

Grace Evangelical Free Church
Issues & Answers: Workman

2 Timothy 2:15: Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Since every Christian is personally responsible to God for his behavior, he cannot afford to become the intellectual or spiritual slave of someone else. Every child of God is a believer-priest and copies of the Bible in their original languages are available to all. What is expected of the believer in relation to God's Word? To determine the Biblical answer, we look to:

- Historical Context: 2 Timothy 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 2 Timothy as the Apostle Paul, written in approximately 67 A.D., shortly before the Apostle Paul was put to death. Imprisoned yet again, the Apostle Paul felt lonely and abandoned. Recognizing that his earthly life was likely coming to a soon end, 2 Timothy is essentially Paul's "last words." Paul looked past his own circumstances to express concern for the churches and specifically for Timothy. Paul wanted to use his last words to encourage Timothy, and all other believers, to remain passionate for Christ and to remain firm in sound doctrine (2 Timothy 1:1-2:13). Paul reminds Timothy to avoid ungodly beliefs and practices and to flee from anything immoral (2 Timothy 2:14-26). In the end times there will be both intense persecution and apostasy from the Christian faith (2 Timothy 3:1-17). Paul closes with an intense plea for believers to stand firm in the faith and to finish the race strong (2 Timothy 4:1-8) – this progression is of critical importance not only to the advancement of Christianity, but to the advancement of the individual Christian as to personal fulfillment and temporal/eternal reward. [The desire to live a Godly life coupled with the by-product of wanting to exercise your spiritual gift is a natural leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. Proving ineffective as a Christian in relation to these two desires is generally due to three issues: 1) a misunderstanding of God's personal nature directed at you in the personal sense; 2) lack of Biblical study which leads to misunderstanding of God's intent, negatively impacting both your desire to continue as well fruits of your labor; 3) lack of motivation which inhibits a believer's diligence and dedication – most likely due to an imbalance of affection and/or possessions. You have to make a decision as to how you spend your time, you will certainly be called to account for such.]
- Grammatical Usage: "Study" in the Greek is "spoudazo" meaning, "...**hasten** to do a thing...to **exert** oneself, **endeavor**" [three distinct words conveying three distinct actions: get to it, work at it, keep at it]; "approved" in the Greek is "dokimos" meaning, "to receive **after it is tried.**" [The word is used of coins and metals in Gen. 23:16 while in Zech. 13:9 the association with coins and metal continues as they are cast into a furnace to see if it is an "approved" metal.]
- Literal Application: "Apply yourself with diligence in order to commend yourself to God as a worker who has no need to be ashamed because you are always correctly exegeting the Word of Truth."
- Contextual Interpretation: Paul's reference to a workman rightly dividing the Word of God has to do with a common metaphor of the day in which a stone mason cuts stones fair and straight to fit into their places in a building. The stone cutter in a quarry identified his work by signing or marking it with his personal identification. If all the stones were cut properly, in keeping with specifications, they would fit perfectly when assembled. If not the error would be detected at the building site and the culprit would be exposed and shamed. In this sense, Paul is telling Timothy that the Word of God is so perfect in its authorship that when each passage is exegeted properly it fits into the total picture. Thus the inner consistency of the Word of God is set forth. The careless exegete, like the careless stone mason, will find his interpretations of some

isolated passages are inconsistent with others, an embarrassment that he can avoid by the kind of consistent study of the Word which approves the student unto God. There are no contradictions in the divine message – only careless stone masons. Paul charges Timothy get to studying, work at studying and keep studying the Word of God. Why? Besides the practical personal and corporate answers the Word provides to life's issues, it is also the path to being commended or approved by God.

- Scriptural Comparison: Winning the approval of God is a subject of Scripture. In fact, this is the focal issue in the NT's use of the word group that the translators render "approve" in modern versions. While the OT uses involve the paraphrase of a number of expressions, NT use is particularly significant and draws on a distinctive Greek word group, so we want to compare: **1) the Greek words; 2) the approval of people; 3) the approval of God.**
 - **The Greek Words:** the occurrences of "approve/approval" in modern versions almost always signals the appearance in the original of a distinctive Greek word group. "Dokimos", the noun, is used in the NT in the sense of recognition, of being officially approved and accepted. It is found in Rom. 14:18; 16:10; 1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Cor. 10:18; 13:7; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jas. 1:12. "Dokimazo", the verb, implies putting to the test with a view to approving the genuine. That which has been tested is demonstrated to be genuine. The verb is used 23 times in the NT. What is important is the linkage of approval with testing; approval is earned after testing. Our character and our commitments emerge over time. It is only on evidence provided by experience and the passage of time that approval from God is extended. [Paul's big theme is fighting the good fight, running the race, don't falter, seek the prize – again, Scripture must match up with Scripture – like cut stones – they must fit with one another.]
 - **The Approval of People:** Time and experience provide the evidence on which one can be approved. But the criterion by which a person is evaluated is also important. The NT warns against trying to "win the approval of men," even when these persons are fellow believers (Gal. 1:10). There are a number of reasons for this warning. Christ alone is our Master; it is He whom we are to serve (Gal. 1:10). It is dangerous for us to even try to evaluate ourselves as we often are blind to our own faults. Others can not see into the heart of another. Only God's evaluation or commendation counts (2 Cor. 10:18). As for the standards of unbelievers, Paul's pre-conversion approval of the stoning of Stephen shows how questionable their standards were and are (Acts 8:1; 22:29)! Clearly the wrapped consciences of the unsaved will often lead them to overlook serious sin or even to approve of those who today may be called "beautiful people," who's lifestyles deny righteousness (Rom 1:32) [Christie Brinkly comes to mind as does Richard Roberts].
 - **The Approval of God:** Since the approval of God is so vital for us, what does the Bible say about winning it? Several NT passages link God's approval to a subjective attitude and an objective standard. **The subjective attitude is one of commitment to serve Christ** (Rom. 12:2; 14:18). **The objective standard is the Word of God.** In Romans, Paul writes of Jewish reliance on the law and the fact that through the Scriptures the Hebrew people knew God's will. They even approved of it as superior to both the cultures around them as well as their own devices. But, in fact, the Jewish people failed to do what they knew to be the will of God (Rom. 2:17-29). Paul warns Timothy against chattering on in theological disputes while drifting into ungodly behavior [Why we take our positions with humbleness]. An approved workman "correctly handles the Word of Truth," demonstrating God's approval by turning away from wickedness (2 Tim. 2:14-19). Romans 12:1 & 2 sums it up: we are to commit ourselves to be living sacrifices, dedicated to pleasing God. We no longer conform to the unsaved lifestyle, but conform our entire perspective on life according to God's Word which stipulates right, wrong and

the attitude with which we engage with God and others. Then, Paul stipulates, “we will be able to test and to approve what God’s will is.” Paul’s point is a vital one: the Word of God – through which we come to know God’s will – must itself be put to the test by us. We put Scripture to the test by acting on what it says. When we do this, we experience God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will. When we do God’s will, he will be able to approve of us as His good workers who have no need to be ashamed.

- Conclusion: It is easy to get side-tracked in the Christian life. We have to keep our eyes on the prize – being rewarded in Heaven by Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:8). We must strive to avoid both false doctrine and ungodly practices. This can only be accomplished by being grounded in our knowledge of God’s Word and firm in our refusal to accept anything that is unbiblical.