

Topic: Correctly Handling the Word

Text:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman¹ who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles² the word³ of truth⁴. {2Tim 2:15 NIV}

The first thing Paul suggests is, "seek the approval of God, not men."

Lift yourself above earthly standards and seek only God's approval:

"What does God think of what you are saying and what stance you take?"

Timothy can tell that by the Word of God and by the presence of the Spirit of God.

Does Timothy's attitude reflect a loving, compassionate, understanding heart? That is what is characteristic of the Spirit of God.

¹ **1)** a workman, a labourer

a) usually one who works for hire esp. an agricultural worker

2) one who does, a worker, perpetrator

² **1)** to cut straight, to cut straight ways

a) to proceed on straight paths, hold a straight course, equiv. to doing right

2) to make straight and smooth, to handle aright, to teach the truth directly and correctly

³ **1)** of speech

a) a word, uttered by a living voice, embodies a conception or idea

b) what someone has said

1) a word

2) the sayings of God

3) decree, mandate or order

4) of the moral precepts given by God

5) Old Testament prophecy given by the prophets

6) what is declared, a thought, declaration, aphorism, a weighty saying, a dictum, a maxim

c) discourse

3) In John, denotes the essential Word of God, Jesus Christ, the personal wisdom and power in union with God, his minister in creation and government of the universe, the cause of all the world's life both physical and ethical, which for the procurement of man's salvation put on human nature in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the second person in the Godhead, and shone forth conspicuously from His words and deeds.

⁴ objectively

a) what is true in any matter under consideration

1) truly, in truth, according to truth

2) of a truth, in reality, in fact, certainly

b) what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man, moral and religious truth

1) in the greatest latitude

2) the true notions of God which are open to human reason without his supernatural intervention

c) the truth as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man, opposing alike to the superstitions of the Gentiles and the inventions of the Jews, and the corrupt opinions and precepts of false teachers even among Christians

2) subjectively

a) truth as a personal excellence

1) that candour of mind which is free from affection, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit

Then, Timothy is to work hard at understanding the usage of the words of Scripture; that is what Paul means here. Timothy is to be a workman, a laborer, somebody who needs not be ashamed because he has done his homework adequately; he has investigated the whole counsel of God's word what the text in question mean.

It takes me about 10-14 hours to prepare a sermon.

What do I do?

I look at how the words in the passage under study are used elsewhere in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

I understand the languages I am working with are beyond the English language.

Greek and the Hebrew, understanding these languages takes a lot of work.

The Original

One has to go back to the original Greek or Hebrew text and see what the words mean in their original context.

The Customs

Then one has to set the passage in the customs of the first, or earlier, centuries.

One of the reasons much of doctrine is misunderstood today is because church leaders, preachers and teachers have not done their homework.

Paul urges Timothy to be "A WORKMAN WHO HAS NO NEED TO BE ASHAMED," because he has put in the requisite (obligatory, mandatory, essentials, vital, required) work at discovering what the words of Scripture really mean.

Then, Timothy is to "RIGHTLY HANDLE THE WORD OF TRUTH."

That has been widely misunderstood in our day.

In Scofield Reference Bible, which uses the King James text, to "rightly divide the word of truth." means that as one read through the New Testament or the Old Testament, one was to divide it up according

to which part was addressed to the Jews, which part to the Gentiles, and which part to the Christians; or, one was to divide it according

to that which dealt with the church versus that which dealt with the kingdom; whether it addressed itself to those who are under the Law or those who are under grace.

That gave rise to what is frequently called, Dispensationalism⁵, where one had to be very careful to understand exactly who God was speaking to when he said something.

There is some value and some truth in that view, but I have had to learn that this text is not talking about dividing the word of truth.

The word is more properly translated, "**rightly handling the word of truth.**" Actually, the word used here is a very interesting one.

It is a single word which means "to cut straight" -- "cut straight the word of truth,"

Paul says. Commentators have struggled as to what Paul is referring to in that metaphor.

According to that view, Paul was suggesting that as Timothy reads the Scriptures he is to get hold of the final truth and not deviate from that; he is to plow a straight course through the word of truth.

Other commentators have thought Paul was referring to the way a stonemason builds a wall: he drops a plumb line, then he is careful to cut the stone so it is straight according to the plumb line.

I think, however, that Paul is probably referring to his own experience as a tentmaker. Timothy traveled with Paul, so he must have worked many nights with him, cutting and sewing material together to make tents. That is what Paul is referring to; a figure that Timothy would well understand.

You ladies who have made garments from patterns know how important it is to cut the material straight. If you cut it on a line away from what the pattern says you will end up with a piece that is either too small or too large. When you try to fit it with other pieces it will either droop and sag because it is too large, or it will pull and pinch because it is too small. That is what Paul is talking about.

When you handle the Scriptures, he says to Timothy, be sure to cut a straight line. That is, understand the words that are used as they relate to other Scriptures that deal with the subject, so that when the whole thing is put together you will not have to pull or stretch or try to fit something in that does not quite belong; you have clearly understood what each section means, and it will all fit together naturally.

Paul is dealing here with a very important principle in understanding the truth of Scripture -- all Scripture must be understood in the light of the rest of Scripture.

We really have not ever understood any single passage until we have carefully tried to fit it with all that the Scriptures say about it. One of the most frequent ways in which error begins is when one group takes a single passage, or a single book, of Scripture and zeros in on a single text, or a

⁵ In the Scofield Reference Bible a dispensation is "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God"

Dispensationalism says that God uses different means of administering His will and grace to His people. These different means coincide with different periods of time.

Scofield says there are seven dispensations: of innocence, of conscience, of civil government, of promise, of law, of grace, and of the kingdom. Dispensationalists interpret the scriptures in light of these (or other perceived) dispensations. Compare to Covenant.

few chosen texts, and builds its entire doctrine on that one passage.

- Tongues
- Prosperity
- Health

But that is ignoring all the rest that Scripture says about tongues. It is very important that the whole passage be understood and that it fits without difficulty the rest of Scripture.