

Lesson 22

Correctly Teaching the Word of Truth

Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth, 2 Timothy 2.15.

Introduction

2 Timothy is widely regarded to be Paul's final letter. In it he writes to encourage his faithful protégé, Timothy, to be strong. Timothy would become a pillar in the early church, carrying on the banner of truth after Paul's death. By the power of the Spirit, Paul knew there would be great battles with false teachers ahead. Great persecution was coming. The challenges would be great. To be successful, Timothy would need to depend heavily on God.

Hardship has often been associated with Christianity, and this was certainly the rule of the day during the first century. Paul reminds us that just as soldiers experience and endure hardship and difficulty, so does the Christian. Paul also thought of athletes who subject themselves to rigorous training and the farmers who labor to produce food. Discipline and perseverance are required to be successful, see 2 Timothy 2.1-13.

Christians must be completely devoted to their duty and mission. Inherent in this is an embracing of a biblical worldview, where the revealed word of God is valued as *the* source of truth and authority, coming from the mind of God himself. The Spirit has revealed the word through the apostles with the intention that we obey it. This involves submission to a higher, supreme, and eternal authority, acknowledging that we are not in control of our life. God clearly draws the line between truth and lies. Anything not of the truth is a lie. Everything God says is true. Everything Satan says is a lie in one form or another. So, we must decide. Who will we follow?

Those who live inside the biblical worldview will immediately find themselves at odds with the world, which affirms there is no truth, authority, rules, or a judge. Those in darkness resent and resist the truth of Scripture. They cannot accept it and therefore refuse to believe, John 8.43; 3.19-20. They regard the word of God as folly because they are not spiritually discerned, 1 Corinthians 2.14. Biblical truths on morality and instructions are regarded as offensive and backward. We need to know that going in and understand that we cannot be faithful to the Word of God and somehow mitigate this.

What is the answer then? How does the Christian live in this world?

Be Diligent to be Approved by God

The meaning of the verb in the opening sentence of verse 15 means to have zealous persistence in accomplishing a task. It is used in the sense of having or showing keen interest, expressing intense desire, or impatient expectancy. In this case, as a presenter of the Word, Timothy was to exercise maximum effort in his work of examination, interpretation, teaching, and application. To help people come to a

better understanding of truth he would need to deliver his teaching in the most effective, clear, and complete way possible.

This was all for the purpose of pleasing God. This should be the motive of every diligent and selfless teacher in the church. It is not about pleasing oneself or pleasing others. It is about moving with the understanding that one day one will stand before God and give an account. One's teaching will be brought to view.⁶⁹ We certainly want to come before the Lord and find Him pleased with our work. Our greatest desire should be to hear Christ say, *well done, good and faithful servant*, Matthew 25:21. Pleasing other men is not the objective.

For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ, Galatians 1:10.

Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, who examines our hearts, 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

Those who ignore, resent, reject, or fight the truth will find themselves ashamed on the last, great day. Their conduct will be exposed.

So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming, 1 John 2:28.

Correctly Teach the Word of Truth

The primary distinguishing mark of the faithful teacher will be his commitment to accurately presenting the word of truth. *Correctly teaching* is translated “handling accurately,” or “rightly dividing” the truth in other translations. It means to cut straight. One dictionary says, “it plainly means ‘cut a path in a straight direction’ or ‘cut a road across country (that is forested or otherwise difficult to pass through) in a straight direction’, so that the traveler may go directly to his destination.”⁷⁰ This word was used to describe a person laying a straight line of bricks, of a farmer plowing a straight row, or of a craftsman cutting a straight line.⁷¹ We can take from this that every part of God's truth is to be handled with care for accuracy. Those who teach have been given a sacred trust (Paul calls it a deposit earlier in this epistle) and are expected to handle it rightly.

Scripture is God's inerrant, authoritative, sufficient, and sole source of divine truth. It is without contradiction because God is clear. There are no errors, discrepancies, lies, or inconsistencies in the truth He reveals. It can be understood without mental gymnastics. So, how can we correctly teach the word of truth?

First, we must exercise our mind. We need to search for truth and allow the outcome to be the outcome – *not something we have predetermined beforehand*. Next, we need an honest and humble heart that moves

⁶⁹ Liddell, H.G. *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, p. 609.

⁷⁰ BDAG, p. 722.

⁷¹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *2 Timothy*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, p. 76.

from pure motives. There is nothing mystical about the process ... we learn what God wants by reading, just like any other letter or document. We learn through language used by real people.

The Urgency of the Matter

What happens when the word is not handled correctly? A quick look at verses 14 and 16 reveal the answer. In them Paul speaks of *words to no profit* and *profane and vain babblings*, that *ruin the hearers*. These things *increase to more ungodliness*. It is a profound responsibility to teach the word of God. On one hand we can build people up in the faith. On the other, we could destroy their faith. Hymenaeus and Philetus are good examples of what can happen when things go wrong.

The contrast of the two kinds of teaching is seen in the phrases *correctly teaching the word of truth*, v. 15, and *strayed concerning the truth*, v. 18. One means, as we previously learned “to cut straight,” while the other literally means “to miss the target.” The goal of every teacher is to cut straight and to hit the mark.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Why is having a biblical worldview of such importance?
2. How does the world typically react to a Christian worldview? How must we handle that?
3. With what kind of energy are we to approach our study of the Word? Why?
4. What does it mean to *correctly teach the word*?
5. Why is the matter of such urgency?