

What Does It Mean To “Rightly Divide The Word?”

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One of the biggest stumbling blocks to developing a strong faith in God is the failure to study His word. The Bible teaches Christians to “**STUDY TO SHOW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH**” (**2 Timothy 2:15; KJV**). Sometimes preachers or teachers of God’s word will appeal to this verse attempting to prove Christians must study the Bible. The word “STUDY” as used in this verse is not talking about carefully reading the book, taking notes or consulting commentaries. The modern reader must remember word meanings change over time. Today, the word can refer to preparation for a test but it can also mean to endeavor diligently or to give careful thought to a thing. This is what Paul wanted Timothy to do. Newer translations like the New King James Version (NKJV) translate this verse as “**BE DILIGENT TO PRESENT YOURSELF APPROVED TO GOD.**”

How does one make certain he is approved in God’s sight? **First** the person must be a Christian. Though God loves everyone he does not approve of sin. The penalty for sin is death. That clearly shows God does not condone sin. God forgives sinners when they obey the gospel. Such obedience transforms a lost sinner into a child of God (**Romans 6:17-18**).

Second, the Christian must realize it is his obligation to make his calling and election sure. The disciple who gives diligence to develop the characteristics listed in **2 Peter 1:5-7** is promised he will never stumble or fall. The word election indicates a choosing just when a person casts a ballot at the voting booth. God chooses to accept those who present their bodies as living sacrifices (**Romans 12:1-2**). The Christian who lives faithfully is secure in his salvation (**1 John 1:7, 9**).

Third, one who is approved by God must be a workman. But, what work did Paul have in mind in **2 Timothy 2:15**? Was he talking about general works of the church? No. He was specifically speaking about how one handles the word of God. A Christian will not be ashamed before God as long as he handles His word correctly. The expression “rightly dividing” literally means to make a straight cut. It takes careful work to dissect the scriptures and the reader must be careful to properly interpret the word of God. So, even though the word study as used in this passage is better translated as give diligence, the rest of the verse does teach the need to study. The required work is employing the mind. Thinking is necessary to have the proper understanding of a passage.

How should one go about rightly dividing the word? Crucial to this task is understanding the Bible is ultimately from the mind of God though men were employed in its writing (**2 Peter 1:21**). It is called the word of truth. Truth is absolute, not flexible. The Christian should never attempt to twist the scriptures to make it say what he wants. Doing so leads to spiritual destruction (**2 Peter 3:16**). The student of God’s word must reverently approach the scripture with the desire to learn God’s will and conform his life to that knowledge.

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It is also extremely important to understand the Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The laws of the Old Testament were taken out of the way when Jesus died on the cross (**Colossians 2:13-14**). Since that time all of mankind has lived under the under the universal law of Christ (**Galatians 6:2**). God still wants man to learn from the Old Testament but it must be remembered those commandments have been replaced by the last Will and Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ (**Romans 15:4**) Failing to make this distinction is failing to rightly divide the word of truth.

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