

INTRODUCTION

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul gives us eight portraits or examples of a faithful teacher or servant. The first four are listed in verses 1-6.

THE FAITHFUL STEWARD (2 Tim. 2:2)

THE OBEDIENT SOLDIER (2:3)

THE DISCIPLINED ATHLETE (2:5)

THE HARD-WORKING FARMER (2:6)

Then we come to verse 7 and Paul gives this command: “Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things” (2 Tim. 2:7). Paul wants us to get a grasp of these first four portraits and their implications. He wants us to fully understand and carefully consider the faithfulness required of a steward, the hardships and obedience of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the hard work and patience of the farmer. That’s what the Lord requires of each of us.

Then we come to the fifth portrait: Jesus! But He’s not simply a portrait; He’s a real flesh and blood example. When you’re struggling in ministry, when the world becomes more and more cynical towards Christ and His church, when Satan turns up the heat through persecution, and when some under your ministry seem to be easily carried away with every wind of doctrine, what do you do?

- Remember Jesus and “keep on” remembering Him (2 Tim. 2:8). As I have already mentioned, Timothy needed reminded of the person and work of Jesus Christ: His incarnation, His death at Calvary, and His glorious resurrection. He needed reminded for his own sake and motivation for his own ministry. He needed reminded of the person and work of Christ to counteract the false teachers. But he also needed reminded that the cross precedes the crown, humiliation comes before exaltation, suffering comes before glory, and it took Calvary before there could be a resurrection, and hardship comes before heaven.
- Remember the power of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:9).
- Remember this faithful saying (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

For if we died with Him,
We shall also live with Him.

If we endure,
We shall also reign with Him.

If we deny Him,
He also will deny us.

If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.

This now brings us to the sixth portrait:

THE WORKMAN (2 Tim. 2:15)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

“Diligent” (the KJV reads “study”) means “to make haste, be eager, to do one’s best, to exert one’s self.” So what Paul is saying here is that as we handle the Word of God, we are “to make haste, be eager, do our best, and give it our all” to be approved of God. How does this come about? It comes through rightly dividing the word of truth. How can he be sure he rightly divides the word of truth? This can only be done through the *diligent* study of God’s word. “Be diligent” is also a command. After all, we are handling the eternal word of God and ministering to eternal souls! The consequences are eternal!

The phrase “rightly dividing,” carries with it the idea of “cutting straight.” It’s the picture of a stone mason who cuts stones to properly fit into place. On two occasions I remember seeing stone masons at work. I first recall seeing a stone mason cut stones for the front of a new church building. The second time was in the house where I grew up. We had a fire place built in our living room, and the face of the fire place was made out of stones. I remember the stone mason laying out the stones on the floor in an orderly fashion, cutting them, and then placing them in their perspective places. It was orderly, beautiful, and as far as I know, it still stands today.

Every word, every verse, every paragraph, every chapter, and every book of the Bible fits together like a puzzle. There is order and beauty. And it still stands today! But we must approach God’s Word as diligent students, rightly dividing the word of truth. It’s not what the passage means to me or to you that really matters. What matters most is what the passage means. Period! We must never give a passage of Scripture our own personal slant. We must never try to force a piece of the puzzle into a place where it really doesn’t fit. When we do, we run the risk of distorting the whole picture! What’s been said is true: “When we take a text out of context, it becomes pretext.” Also, a real good rule of thumb in interpretation is this: “When the literal makes sense, seek no other sense.” I realize there are passages that are figurative and symbolic, and they need to be interpreted as such. But on the other hand, this matter of spiritualizing and allegorizing at every juncture is extremely dangerous.

Not only is “rightly dividing” a builder’s term, but it is also a farmer’s term. It refers to a farmer plowing a straight furrow. Although I’ve never really done a lot of farming, I have worked on a farm some. I know when plowing, how important it is to have the first furrow as straight as possible. You look to the opposite end of the field for a landmark (a tree, a rock, or a post) as a point of reference. And as you plow, you keep your eyes on that landmark. The same holds true when you’re planting the field.

Of course today, all the modern tractors have GPS. Amazing! You hardly have to even steer the tractor! If you fall asleep, an alarm even goes off letting you know you’re at the end of the row and need to turn around.

So what does all of this mean? In a world filled with all kinds of opinions, ideas, and philosophies, we need a sure point of reference. We need something that will stand throughout time. We need a spiritual GPS. We need a compass that will keep us on course. We need a North Star that will never waver when the tide of public opinion turns.

We need a measuring rod and a standard of truth that will never be outdated and will stand when this world's on fire. What might that be? The Word of God which lives and abides forever (1 Pet. 1:23b). But let's make sure we handle it carefully and interpret it correctly. When it comes to biblical interpretation, I believe it's best to follow the advice of the old wise carpenter: "Measure twice and cut once."

CONCLUSION

Now let's consider the application for just a moment. How the first stone is cut, determines how the rest of the stones will fit into place. How straight the first furrow is, determines how the rest of the field is plowed. The application is this: we have a number of teachers in the church, from pre-school to senior adults. We have Sunday School teachers, N2Y Kidz teachers, VBS teachers, teen teachers, young adult teachers, senior adult teachers, and then the pastoral ministry of teaching and preaching. Although they may be individual lessons, classes, or sermons, each one is vitally linked to the other. Each lesson, class, or sermon determines the effectiveness of the next. How each of us interprets a particular passage of Scripture determines the progress of that boy, girl, man and woman in the next class, the next service, and for the future.

The point is this: it *does* matter how we interpret a passage of Scripture, and it *does* matter what we believe. Let me use this as an example. Our church name: *Harrison Free Will Baptist Church* isn't necessarily what defines or describes us. Do you know what really defines and describes what we believe? It's what is taught in the classroom every Sunday or Wednesday, and what is taught and preached from the pulpit every week. What an awesome privilege to deliver the word of God on a regular basis! But on the other hand what an awesome responsibility.

As I close with the words of James, please keep in mind he does not want to discourage those who teach the word of God accurately and faithfully, but he is warning any prospective teacher of *the awesome responsibility teaching actually involves and the faithfulness it actually requires*. James writes:

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment (Jas. 3:1).

As believers, "each of us shall give account of [ourselves] to God" at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12). But those of us who handle the Word of God, are held to a much higher standard. Let's make sure as we handle the Word of God we are eager to do our best and to give our all in order to be approved by God. Again in 2 Timothy 2:4, Paul writes: "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, *that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier*" (italics added).