

Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed **2 Timothy 2:14-26**

14 Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 19 But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

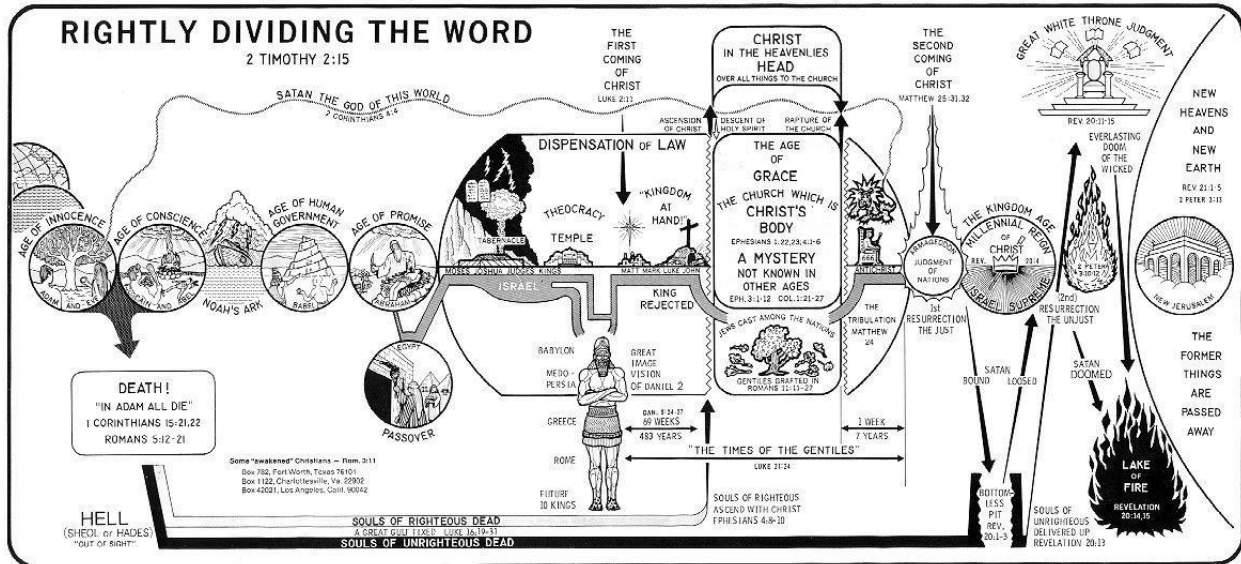
20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

The title of this message is Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed. Do you see the not so hidden acronym in the title? This is the verse used to create the word AWANA. But long before it was an AWANA verse, this was the key verse for dispensational theology. How many have ever owned a Scofield reference Bible? Right now the ESV Study Bible is quite popular and twenty years ago it was the NIV Study Bible but for most of the 20th century, the Scofield reference Bible reigned supreme among evangelicals.

It was known for a brand of theology called Dispensationalism which used the King James version of 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.* Scofield wrote a small book called *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* where he literally divides the Bible into seven parts called "dispensations."¹

The Word of truth, then, has right divisions, and it must be evident that, as one cannot be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" without observing them, so any study of that Word which ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing.²



This way of chopping the Bible into seven parts has been criticized harshly over the years. Listen to what A/W. Pink thought about the belief.

Dispensationalism... is a device of the Enemy, designed to rob the children of no small part of that bread which their heavenly Father has provided for their souls; a device wherein the wily serpent appears as an angel of light, feigning to “make the Bible a new book” by simplifying much in it which perplexes the spiritually unlearned. It is sad to see how widely successful the devil has been by means of this subtle innovation.

These mutilators of the Word tell us that all of the Old Testament from Genesis 12 onwards belongs entirely to Israel after the flesh, and that none of its precepts (as such) are binding upon those who are members of the Church which is the Body of Christ, nor may any of the promises found therein be legitimately appropriated by them.

Not satisfied with their determined efforts to deprive us of the Old Testament, these would-be superexpositors dogmatically assert that the four Gospels are Jewish, and that the Epistles of James and Peter, John and Jude are designed for a “godly Jewish remnant” in a future “tribulation period,” that nothing but the Pauline Epistles contain “Church truth...”³

Personally, I would side more with A.W. Pink than with Scofield. We don't need to solve this dilemma this morning but I brought it up because many of you will get stuck on this verse. Whether or not you hold to Dispensationalism, one thing is certain. This verse does not mean that we are to literally divide the Bible into various parts. The NIV has “correctly handle” the word of truth. The NASB has “accurately handle” and the ESV translates it as “rightly handles.” We are not to chop up the Bible into parts but correctly understand it.

There are two main points for this verse and for the section of 2 Timothy 2.

Right Beliefs—*rightly handling the word of truth*

Right Behavior—*a worker who has no need to be ashamed*

Right beliefs and right behavior always go hand in hand—always. Why did Hitler kill millions of people and want to take over the world? Because he believed what Charles Darwin believed in his infamous book, *The Origin of the Species*. The subtitle of the original version was *The preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. As far as I know, Darwin was not into eugenics. He believed that there were more advanced races—white being the supreme race of course, but he was not in a hurry to help the process move along by killing people. But we know that Hitler, Lenin and Stalin were all deeply influenced by evolution and saw its clear application to genocide.

But destructive Darwinian beliefs do not stop at evil dictators. We all know that there are about one million abortions in the U.S. every year. Why did we become so abortion happy? Because we dehumanized human life. Those who believe that the growing life inside a mother's womb is human and possesses a human soul from the moment of conception do not abort their babies. Those who believe it is a mass of tissues somewhat like a tumor will abort their babies. Not everyone who shares this belief practices abortion, of course, but they live in that camp. Their wrong beliefs bring about wrong behavior.⁴

But the natural result of evolutionary beliefs is far worse than this. Just since 1980, there have been 1.3 billion abortions worldwide. I added up the population of the entire western hemisphere and it totaled less than 1 billion. This is without a doubt, undeniably the worst genocide in human history. Since I began preaching there have been 600 abortions in the world. This is not a message about abortion and genocide but I hope you can see that behavior always follows beliefs. What you believe by and large determines how you behave.

Even though what we believe determines how we behave, one of the best way to understand what we believe is not to start with beliefs, but with behavior. For example, if you say that you believe in generosity, then how much of your income, resources, time and talents are given to serve the Lord and other people. If you give away 1-2% of your income and resources and a couple hours per month in service, then your behavior has betrayed your belief. It doesn't matter what you say that you believe. The fact is that your behavior has shown that you do not believe in being generous.

Here's another one. Let's say you believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, something like this portion of our church's statement of faith.

As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.⁵

If you say that you believe this but spend 10-15 minutes per week reading and studying the Bible, you have no other choice than to call yourself a liar. You don't actually believe what you say you believe, do you? Therefore our beliefs determine our behavior but our behavior reveals our true beliefs.

Now that we know that our beliefs determine our behavior, Paul has his own list of consequences for holding to false teaching.

- Ungodliness (16)
- False teaching spread like gangrene (16)
- Swerved from the truth (17)
- Upsetting the faith of some (17)

I think the second consequence is the most vivid of the four is the gangrene analogy. I was tempted to throw some pictures of gangrenous flesh on the wall but I wouldn't do such a thing to you right before lunch. (Actually, I would *never* do that to you!) But I think we have an idea of what it is like. Gangrene is dead tissue that if it is not cut out and stopped will continue to spread until part or a whole limb is affected. Once it sets hold in a body, unless extreme measures are taken, it will continue to spread and kill.

For a first century writer, you could hardly have picked a better analogy. We are the body of Christ and when false teaching takes hold in the body, unless it is cut out, it will spread like gangrene and will harm the body and could even be life threatening to the body. In fact, every church that has ever died, succumbed to some form of false teaching.

But as potentially deadly and harmful as some false teaching can be, Paul also warned his readers to avoid certain topics. There are two parts to rightly handling the word of truth. One is to pursue sound doctrine but the other is to avoid foolish controversies. Some of the descriptions here deal with what happens when you spend time on arguments and things that are just not that important. In verse 23 he said that such things only breed more quarrels. The word "breed" here literally means "gives birth to." This statement is similar to the kind of person described in 1 Tim. 6:4—*he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions.*

There is a time to ignore unhealthy controversy. When you have a large group of Christians in a single body—the church—there will always be some who pursue controversial issues that are not helpful to the rest of the body. If such people want to study these issues on their own without causing controversy and arguments in the church, then so be it, but don't bring them into your Bible studies and cause confusion among other believers.

There are some issues that are not worth pursuing. However, Paul named two men who were promoting a much more dangerous false belief. *Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened.* What is the danger of holding to this belief? The second coming of Christ and our bodily resurrection is foundational to the gospel.⁶ To deny the bodily resurrection is to deny Christ's resurrection, and if Christ is not raised, then the gospel message is empty (1 Cor. 15:12–17). To deny the resurrection is to deny the truth of the gospel.⁷ This is the kind of belief that must be confronted in the local church.

But the challenge is to know which issue to confront and which to avoid. We need to be watchdogs for the faith but we need to train ourselves not to bark at the friendly and helpful

mailman. A long time ago when we were staying at Karen's parent's house, Karen, me and her brother woke up and the first person to walk into the kitchen set off the house alarm. The thing was blasting like crazy and we had no way to turn it off. The police came to the house and her mom had to drive thirty minutes from her office to reset the alarm. House alarms are not set to recognize friend from foe but as believers we need to have discernment to know the difference between foolish controversies to be avoided and harmful teaching to be confronted.

Lest Timothy or any readers of this letter should worry too much, Paul added a wonderful statement of peace in the midst of warning about false teaching.

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

In the valleys and pitfalls of life where false teachers and harmful teaching abound, God has a firm foundation for the believer and it is this: *The Lord knows those who are his*. This is taken from Numbers 16 when Moses was dealing with the sons of Korah. We all have an idea about how much the Israelites complained and groaned constantly, despite God feeding them by a miraculous provision of manna every single day.

The complaining was hard enough but about a year into their wilderness wandering, 250 men from the family of Korah challenged Moses' leadership. Most of us are familiar with the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. That was an epic battle which ended in fire coming down from the Lord and the execution of all of the false prophets. This battle between Moses and the sons of Korah was no less epic. This was 250 against one. We all have conflicts with other people at times, but have you ever had 250 against you at the same time? Watch how Moses responded to their challenge. *When Moses heard it, he fell on his face and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his..."* There it is—the assurance that the Lord knows his people. Jesus echoed this in John 10.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:27-28). It's one thing to say that I know God but I love to hear that God knows me. If you have trusted in Christ alone, he also knows you. You are his child. And as his child, he keeps you in the palm of his hand. No one can snatch you from his hand. Who is against you right now? Maybe it's not 250 people all at once but you may have your own Korah's rebellion on your hands. You may have someone who is in your face and wants to take you down. Or maybe they are just a thorn in your flesh.

This is how the Lord dealt with Korah's rebellion.

And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly (Numbers 16:31-33).

Now listen. You may want the Lord to open up the earth and swallow up your opponents, but that is not how we are to respond. Remember, right beliefs lead to right behavior and the next paragraph gives us clear instruction about how to deal with an opponent.

And the Lord's servant...

- *must not be quarrelsome*
- *but kind to everyone*
- *able to teach*
- *patiently enduring evil*
- *correcting his opponents with gentleness*

We are talking about how beliefs determine our behavior and that both are equally important. But how many of these responsibilities have to do with beliefs and how many have to do with behavior? If you are attempting to correct someone, you need to be able to teach. You must have a handle on the particular issue at hand but four out of five of these responsibilities are all about how the attitude in which you confront someone. So it's not just what you say but how you say it.

Why is attitude so important? Let me give you an illustration using a paintball gun. How many of you played paintball in the last two weeks? I know a lot of the camp people played lately, including all three of my kids. Tell me if this statement is true or false. "When paintballs hit an object at high speed they have potential to cause damage; a paintball colliding with human skin may cause bruising or further tissue damage."⁸ I know it's true because my children came home with bruises on them.

(Call someone up on stage) Now let's say I had a conflict with my friend here, or I needed to correct them about something. (Holding a paintball gun) Now what if I came out guns blazing and shot about thirty paintballs at my opponent. And while still pointing my gun at them I said, "Listen, I have something very important to tell you." How likely are they to want to listen to me? Thirty paintballs at point blank range is going to cause a lot of bruising and tissue damage. There is no way on earth that this person is going to listen to anything I say cause I just to them to pieces.

This is how we often approach people—with guns a blazing. And then we wonder why they don't listen to us. This is the way we parent our children. "Hey son...pop, pop, pop...now clean your room when I tell you to next time." Sometimes this is the way we evangelize. "Excuse me sir...pop, pop, pop...now don't forget, Jesus loves you." This is the way we treat one another at church. "I think the Lord wants me to share something with you...pop, pop, pop...Hey thanks for listening."

God is telling us to lay down our guns. Use gentleness, kindness, patience, never be quarrelsome. Yes, correct if you need to, but please lay down your gun first. I think one of the reasons we come out with guns blazing is because we fail to understand the difference between our role and God's role. Look at the difference between our area of responsibility and God's.

God may perhaps...

- *grant them repentance*
- *leading to a knowledge of the truth*
- *they may come to their senses*

- *and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

Our problem is that we want to do the things that God alone can do. We want the other person to be repentant so we push hard. We want them to come to a knowledge of the truth so we shoot them down. But this is not our arena. Only God can grant repentance. Only the Holy Spirit can lead to a knowledge of the truth. Only Christ can break the snare of the devil. If we could just do our part and let God do his part, we wouldn't have to resort to blazing guns and the like.

The last few weeks I have left you with snippets from John Newton. His pastor's heart was formed in the crucible of great suffering. Here is what he had to say about confronting an opponent.

As to your opponent, I wish, that, before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. . . . [If he is a believer,] in a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts. . . . [If he is an unconverted person,] he is a more proper object of your compassion than your anger. Alas! "He knows not what he does." But you know who has made you to differ.⁹

Rich Maurer
June 23, 2013

¹ The seven dispensations are: Innocence, Conscience, Government, Promise, Law, Church/Grace, Millennial Kingdom.

² C.I Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 1896.

³ A.W. Pink, *Application of the Scriptures , A Study in Dispensationalism*, 1952.

⁴ Recently while speaking at a women's rally, Chelsea Clinton bemoaned the fact that her great grandmother did not have access to Planned Parenthood. I am not sure how she reconciles that fact that if she had, dear Miss Chelsea would not have been standing there rallying the troops as she herself would never have been born.

⁵ <http://go.efca.org/resources/document/efca-statement-faith>

⁶ This false belief persisted in the early church after Paul.

whoever twists the sayings of the Lord to suit his own sinful desires and claims that there is neither resurrection nor judgment—well, that person is the first-born of Satan (Polycarp *Letter to the Philippians* 7.1–2, c. A.D. 110)

2 *Clem.* 9:1–5 (c. A.D. 100–130).—And let none of you say that this flesh is not judged and does not rise again. Understand this: In what state were you saved? In what state did you recover your sight, if it was not while you were in this flesh? We must, therefore, guard the flesh as a temple of God. For just as you were called in the flesh, so you will come in the flesh. If Christ, the Lord who saved us, became flesh (even though he was originally spirit) and in that state called us, so also we will receive our reward in this flesh.

⁷ Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Vol. 46: Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary (527). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paintball_marker

⁹ The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 2269