

Handle God's Word correctly!

(2 Timothy 2:15; reading 2:8–26)

It is important to guard against mishandling the Word of God, such as taking verses out of context. Such a practice contributes to the wrong supposition that there are many interpretations of the Bible as well as applications that are strained or even foreign to the text. The Apostle Paul in his final inspired letter challenged Timothy to handle God's Word accurately.

Correct handling of God's Word is necessary for God's approval. We should be diligent to accurately handle God's Word, so that we may stand approved before God. Three questions help us fully appreciate this charge of Paul to Timothy.

I. *What does handling God's Word accurately mean?*

1. *The meaning of the word "accurately handling":* though it is a rare word, meaning literally "to cut straight", suggested figures illustrate the sense of the word here.
 - Just as a leather-worker cut the leather straight to piece it together, so God's Word is handled that it fits together, without self-contradiction.
 - Similarly a stone mason cut stones straight to fit properly in a building.
 - As in Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5, the word can refer to making a straight and even road through forests and hills to get the traveler easily to the destination. Similarly cutting the Word of God straight is giving a clear, accurate explanation of the meaning with appropriate application.
2. *The sense from the context supports and illustrates this meaning.*
 - Empty, worldly chatter (2:16) puts worldly thinking into the Bible rather than correctly drawing out of the Bible its meaning, and hence leads to ungodly living.
 - Wandering from the truth (2:17) departs from the straight path and teaches error.
 - Foolish and stupid arguments (2:23) disregard God (cf. Psalm 14:1; 53:1; Matthew 7:26; 23:17) and have a worldly perspective (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:25, 27). Those who so argue have not properly informed themselves from Scripture.
 - Such arguments produce quarrels instead of kind, gentle instruction with the goal of restoring those who have erred (2:24–26).

Handling God's Word accurately – cutting it straight – means knowing the truth, gently communicating it, and seeking appropriate application to bring people closer to God.

II. *What does handling God's Word accurately require?*

1. *Handling God's Word accurately requires diligence.* The diligent person is conscientious, seeking eagerly to do right all that needs to be done.
2. *Handling God's Word accurately requires work.* The workman puts out effort to accomplish the job, laboring until tired (cf. 1 Timothy 5:17).
3. *Handling God's Word accurately requires the Holy Spirit.* Our own diligence and work are not enough to handle God's Word accurately. We need God's Spirit to work in and through us.
 - Just as the Spirit is needed to guard the Word (1:14), He is needed to understand the Word (1 Corinthians 2:14) and apply it to the heart of someone (2 Timothy 2:25).
 - The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), which includes gentleness, kindness and patience (2 Timothy 2:24–25; 4:2), is essential in applying God's Word to the needs of others.

III. *What does handling God's Word accurately produce?*

Though the Word of God is a sword (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12) which accomplishes God's purposes, repentance is not guaranteed. However, handling the Word of God accurately does produce effects of which we can be assured.

1. *Handling God's Word accurately removes cause for shame.* We will one day stand before the Creator-God who has spoken. If we have neglected to handle His Word well, we will be ashamed. But cutting is straight removes as reason for shame.
2. *Handling God's Word accurately gives cause for approval.* Relying upon God's Spirit to accurately and gently communicate its meaning and application brings God's approval. Those who do so will be judged as good and faithful servants.

Though there are difficult passages in the Bible, we do better to admit not understanding than to distort and twist them to make them say what we want or think we understand (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). Instead ask God for help in understanding. Look in the context for help. Compare translations. Listen to good teaching but examine everything according to Scripture (cf. Acts 17:11).

Seek to understand what the original author meant. Apply it in the sense it was intended. Strive to be a workman approved to God with no reason to be ashamed.