

The Message of the Bible

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15, New King James Version

There has been much suffering throughout history because people misinterpret, mishandle and - to be plain - butcher the Word of God, whether by passionate ignorance or devious misuse. There is a right way and a wrong way to interpret the Word, but we need to do our due diligence to study it in context to ensure that we are “rightly dividing” (correctly analyzing and handling) it.

Some translations of the Bible say: “study to show yourself approved”. The thought being communicated is not that we should simply read scripture, nor that we should merely study it to accumulate knowledge, but that we should be diligent to exert ourselves in pursuing knowledge (truth) so that we are able to help people by correctly handling and teaching the truths in it.

Although some people may mishandle the Word maliciously, most often it is simply the result of ignorance: they just don't know any better. This may be because, generally, we all study the Word through the filters of our upbringing, our traditions, what we've always believed, or by our experiences. The problem is that ignorance will only cause us to perish (Hosea 4:6) and it never brings freedom; only a knowledge of truth will bring freedom (John 8:32). Correct knowledge is the antidote to ignorance and perishing.

Through diligent study of the Word, we present ourselves approved to God. “Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God” - God doesn't present us, we present ourselves. Our study of the Word does not cause Him to approve of us or accept us, and a lack of diligent study doesn't make us less accepted by God – we are accepted by Him because we are in Christ, not because we study the Word. Our diligent study of the Word should bring us into a greater awareness of God's acceptance. A lack of diligent study will make us less aware, or completely ignorant, of His acceptance.

It is important to study the Word and know what it says. When we do not diligently study the Word, we could end up going into error (mishandling the Word), which will result in us

not knowing the truth, or believing lies which will result in fruit-failure (we will either have no fruit, or the wrong fruit). Additionally, this could cause us to feel shame when we realise that we are in error. When we study the Word and discover truth, we always have the choice to receive it or not. When we see that we are wrong, or realize that we have believed a lie, we have a choice: to feel condemnation or liberation. Condemnation and shame are never from God - but if we do not humble ourselves to the truth, we might feel some shame. We should feel ashamed if we hold onto a lie when the truth has been revealed to us. In this situation, God is not shaming us at all – our ignorance is.

²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Matthew 22:29, New King James Version

“You are wrong” (AMPC), “You are deluded” (TPT). Not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God puts us in a deficit and causes us to be in error. “The power of God” could be referring to the gospel which the apostle Paul states is the power of God (Romans 1:16). Many people know a lot of Bible, but they don’t know the gospel. The Bible is not the gospel, but the Bible *contains* the gospel. We need to learn to rightly divide the word so that we can know the difference and accurately present it.

¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

Mark 7:13, New King James Version

We must never hold onto lies, assuming we know everything. That’s pride. It is vital that we humble ourselves, so that when confronted with new or different information, we study it out in the Bible to see if we need to change or not. When we see truth and it exposes a lie in our lives, we must not allow feelings of guilt, condemnation or even embarrassment – rather, we should submit to the truth of the Word and allow liberation to take place. We may have believed a certain lie for years; it may even be a very cherished tradition or a teaching that has greatly blessed us. But when the truth of the word exposes a lie we must always embrace the truth if we want to grow and walk in greater fruitfulness. The lie or tradition that we hold to may have even come from a respected Bible teacher that we enjoy

listening to and love very much - but we must never hold the “teacher of the Word” above the Word, and while we love and honour men and women who have invested into us, we can never honour them above God’s word.

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

2 Timothy 3:15-16, King James Version

When studying any verse in the Bible, it is important for us to consider the context. We cannot merely define words according to the dictionary, or our understanding - we need to consider the author’s intent. When we read the word “scripture”, we generally think of our Bibles: Genesis to Revelation. However, the apostle Paul, who wrote the book of Second Timothy, didn’t have a Bible like we have it. Second Timothy was written around 64-65 A.D., and at that time, all Paul would have had were the Jewish books of Genesis to Malachi. It is possible that there were also a few New Testament letters in circulation at that time, but when Paul refers to “scripture”, he is not referring to the Christian Bible; he is talking about Genesis to Malachi. I am not saying that Matthew to Revelation is not inspired – it most certainly is. But when Paul says, “from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures” and “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable”, he is referring to Genesis to Malachi. Knowing this is important, because it helps us better understand what the writer of a verse is trying to communicate.

Paul is saying that the Old Testament (Genesis to Malachi) is inspired by God and is beneficial or profitable for doctrine (what we believe and teach others to be true), for reproof (conviction of knowing right from wrong), for correction (to restore to the right way; to put on the correct path) and instruction *in* - not *for* - righteousness (the scriptures point us *in* the direction of righteousness – Jesus – not in the direction *for* obtaining it by our efforts).

In this verse, Paul also gives us the purpose of the Old Testament scriptures, which is to “make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”. This is the message of the Bible: it’s all about Jesus and salvation which is found in Him by faith (by trusting Him).

Jesus did not have a Bible like we do, and so when He refers to “scriptures”, we can be sure that He is referring to the Old Testament books of Genesis to Malachi.

²⁵ Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” ²⁷ And beginning at Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and all the (writings of the) Prophets, He expounded (explained) to them in all the Scriptures (Genesis to Malachi) the things concerning Himself.

Luke 24:25-27, New King James Version (brackets mine)

After His resurrection, Jesus used the scriptures (Genesis to Malachi) to explain that they were pointing to Himself and His death and resurrection. Jesus didn’t explain *all the Scriptures* to them but rather all the things in Scripture concerning *Himself*.

⁴⁴ Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.” ⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding (through teaching), that they might comprehend (understand) the Scriptures.

⁴⁶ Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, (that the Messiah, the Christ, should suffer and rise from the dead) and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Luke 24:44-47, New King James Version (brackets mine)

Jesus was using the Old Testament books of Genesis to Malachi to reveal Himself and show that He is the fulfilment of the scriptures. We should use the Old Testament like Jesus and other New Testament writers did; not to teach about the law and how people should live, but to teach the good news of Jesus and what He has done for us.

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

John 1:45, New King James Version

There are many good things you can learn from the Old Testament scriptures (Genesis to Malachi), but their primary purpose was to point to the coming Messiah or the Christ, the Anointed One, and how He would redeem mankind from sin.

³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

John 5:39, New King James Version

The religious Jews were diligent students of the scriptures, but they were missing the point altogether - because they were looking for eternal life in the scriptures, and not seeing that these scriptures pointed to Jesus as their Messiah, and that in Him is eternal life. Their diligent effort in studying the scriptures was aimed in the wrong direction and this was to their shame, because they then failed to find “Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth.” If they had seen what the scripture was trying to show them, then they would not have rejected Jesus and they would have found eternal life.

We can learn many things from the Old Testament scriptures of Genesis to Malachi but their primary purpose is to point us towards Jesus and the salvation (eternal life) He offers. As Paul wrote (2 Timothy 3:15-16), the holy scriptures are able to “make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”. This is the message of the Old Testament and the entire Bible: it’s all about Jesus and salvation which is found in Him by faith (by trusting Him).

Questions for reflection

1. What stands out for you from today's lesson?
2. It's important for us to diligently study the word. What does it mean to be diligent?
3. Hosea 4:6. What is the result of ignorance?
4. John 8:32. What will a knowledge of truth bring?
5. When Paul and Jesus refer to *the scriptures*, what are they talking about?
6. Luke 4:17-21, Luke 24:44-47. How did Jesus use, or teach from the Old Testament?
7. John 1:45. How did Philip, a Jew, use the scripture as recorded in this verse?
8. Eternal life.
 - a. John 3:16. How do we obtain eternal life?
 - b. John 10:27-28. Where do we obtain Eternal life?
 - c. John 5:39-40. What was the purpose of the Old Testament scriptures?
 - d. 1 John 5:12 NKJV & TPT. Who has eternal life?
9. 2 Timothy 3:15. What is the message of the Old Testament scriptures?

Answers

1. Own answer.
2. Own answers. Dictionary.com says, “steady and careful application proper attention or care.”
3. Ignorance will only cause us to perish.
4. Freedom.
5. Genesis to Malachi; the books of the Old Testament.
6. To reveal that He was the Christ (the Promised Messiah); to show that the Scriptures pointed towards Him.
7. To reveal that Jesus was the Promised Messiah written of “Moses in the law, and the prophets.”
8. Eternal life.
 - a. By believing in Jesus.
 - b. In Jesus.
 - c. To point to Jesus so that we might obtain eternal life in Him.
 - d. Whoever has Jesus.
9. “to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”. This is the message of the Bible: it’s all about Jesus and salvation which is found in Him by faith (by trusting Him).