

APPROVED OF GOD

Br. Norman Rice

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Tim. 2:15

While we immediately recognize these words as an admonition from the Apostle Paul to Timothy, the admonition is applicable to all members of the body of Christ and should be taken to heart individually. Therefore, let us carefully analyze this admonition to learn what Paul is admonishing Timothy to do that we might do the same.

The apostle says “study”—what does he mean for us to do? Study is translated from the Greek word *Spoudazo*, #4704 in Strong’s concordance. Its definition: to use speed, i.e. to make effort, be prompt or earnest; do (give) diligence, be diligent (forward), endeavor, labour, study.

Obviously then this word *Spoudazo* could properly be translated “give diligence” is translated “study” only once—2 Tim. 2:15—our text under consideration.

In Heb. 4:11 it is translated “labour”—“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” In 2 Pet. 3:14 it is translated “diligent”—“wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” In 2 Tim. 4:9 and 21, it is translated “diligence” and in Titus 3:12 “diligent.”

We feel, however, the translation of *Spoudazo* as “study” in this text is a good translation when taken in context with the remainder of the verse—“rightly dividing the word of truth.” For how can we rightly divide the word of truth unless we become familiar with it through study—careful, diligent study. We believe our appreciation of the meaning of “study” in this text is enhanced by an appreciation of the other usages of this Greek word.

Our appreciation thus enlarged, we see we are being admonished to make an effort in our study—to thoroughly apply ourselves in a study of God’s word; to be diligent in study—to labor in study; and to be prompt and earnest in our study—properly redeeming the time. A diligent application to a study of His word, will be compensated by a deeper appreciation of His plans and purposes and a greater measure of His holy spirit.

The Lord has not established any minimum standards for the knowledge required. It is incumbent upon each of us to know as much as we can concerning His word for thus it is that we put on the whole armour of God. True, all do not possess the same degree of mental ability. Some by birth are endowed with greater reasoning power than others.

However, this should be the only factor limiting our knowledge and understanding of God's word, not a lack of diligence in study.

Our Master assured us in John 7:17, "If any man will do his will [that is the will of our Heavenly Father] he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Again he said in John 8:31, 32: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." And John 16:13: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth ...". Thus we have His assurance that He will bless our efforts to know and understand His Word.

A deep appreciation and knowledge of God's word, is indeed an evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and it rejoices our hearts when we witness it in our brethren, even as Paul rejoiced over the Colossians (Col. 1:3, 2, 9): "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all saints, For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Continuing in Col. 2:1-3: "For I would that ye knew what great conflict [struggle] I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Why did the Apostle have such a struggle, a care for those whom he had not seen in the flesh? Verse 4 says "lest any man should beguile you with enticing words"—also verse 18 of Chapter 2. He was concerned that they maintain purity of doctrine. He was concerned that they be rooted and grounded in a proper understanding of the doctrines lest they be led astray by enticing words.

Perhaps the greatest single deterrent to a diligent study of God's word are statements such as—"We don't need to understand this doctrine or that doctrine—we need to have more love for the brethren." Thus a tendency has developed to consider the knowledge of the doctrines as relatively unimportant.

We certainly concur in the importance of love for the brethren for the Apostle says if we have all knowledge, without love it profiteth us nothing. 1 Cor. 13 But we should recognize the process by which love and the proper exercise of love is developed. Love must be exercised in harmony with the principles of truth and righteousness, which principles we learn only through a careful study of His word.

If an understanding of the doctrines is not necessary for our spiritual development, for what purpose were they given? And how much effort and concern on the part of the Apostles was wastefully expended. And why did Paul write thus to Titus: “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” Titus 2:1 Therefore, we feel the admonition in our text to “Study to show thyself approved” is most timely and helpful to the church at the present time.

We have seen that the word Study in our text also includes the thoughtful laboring diligently to be approved. Now let us notice that our text further denotes the underlying purpose of our study: “Study to show thyself approved unto God.” The Apostle’s thought is that we should expend our efforts in seeking God’s approval and not the approval of man.

While we are not to seek the approval of men, this does not mean we are to be totally unconcerned about what men might think about our conduct. For instance we are admonished to: “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” 2 Thes. 5:22 “Walk honestly toward them that are without.” 2 Thes. 4:12 “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles.” 1 Pet. 2:12 “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.” Rom. 12:17 And as we seek to be guided by these principles in our lives our neighbors and acquaintances will notice our endeavor to live good Christian lives. Thus we may enjoy a measure of approval from the world even though they may disapprove of our doctrines. But following these admonitions does not mean we are seeking the approval of man—rather, we seek to avoid anything that might bring a reproach upon the Lord’s cause or his people.

While the Apostle does not say “Study the Scriptures,” certainly this is implied in the latter portion of the text. For if we are to be approved of God we must become familiar with His Word—His revelations, His plan. After having become familiar with God through a study of his Word we are able to discern His will. And what better way to gain the approval of our Heavenly Father than to do His will—to be guided by His will in all of our affairs. This should be the innermost desire of all who have this special relationship of children of God. His will should be our highest law, and we should daily and hourly take great pleasure in this precious privilege to know and to do His will. David in Psalms 1:1, 2 says, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” And the attitude of a thoroughly consecrated heart toward God’s law—God’s will—should even surpass these noble sentiments expressed by David.

Then to us the thought of our text “Study to show thyself approved unto God” implies meditation, consideration upon how his Word, his will, is applicable to all of life’s affairs. This is not perfunctory worship, but entails a diligent use of every available means to

learn what his will is concerning us. The thought of our text would also include the admonition to study ourselves, study our conduct, make an honest appraisal of ourselves and become well acquainted with ourselves.

Sometimes this may be difficult because we may not like what we see. But must know our talents and our limitations that we may serve along the lines we are best suited. We must know our weak points that they may be guarded against and special effort put forth for improvement.

So we must search our hearts—do we love righteousness and hate iniquity? Is our love for righteousness growing stronger each day or is it weakening? We must study our hearts to see if we are really striving as we should daily to cast out the old leaven of Sin. Are we daily active in striving to avoid error and as the Apostle admonishes to “shun profane and vain babblings.”

We know that the imputed righteousness of Christ covers our imperfections and we are thus reckonedly cleansed from sin. But are we diligent in studying our conduct, to the end that we might follow the Apostle John’s admonition: “And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3) To the extent of our ability we are to endeavor to make our reckoned righteousness an actual righteousness as much as possible.

How may we do this? By constantly resisting sin—sin in thought, sin in word, and sin in deed. This must begin with the cleansing of our thoughts. As the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor. 10:5: “Casting down imaginations [reasonings], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” To faithfully carry out this admonition from the Apostle we must study diligently. We must study our lives—that we abstain from even the appearance of evil, that we be circumspect in every aspect of our lives—thought, word and deed. We need to be on guard lest in any way we bring dishonor to the cause to which we have dedicated our lives. Thus it is evident that only those who study diligently gain divine approval and acceptance.

Returning to our text—“A workman that needeth not to be ashamed”—here we are given a further requirement in our efforts to stand approved of God: workmen “that needeth not to be ashamed.” Let us consider this word “workman” first. The word itself suggests the thought of being engaged in service, doesn’t it? Whose service are we engaged in? God’s work, for we are God’s servants. In 2 Cor. 6:1, Paul speaks of us “As workers together with him”—with God. “For we are labourers together with God” he declares (1 Cor. 3:9) All during the Gospel age a great work progressed—the calling out of the church class from the world. And now during this harvest time, this great work

continues, though on a smaller scale than before—one here and one there being called out of the world to be of this church class and in turn share as “workers together with him.”

Speaking to this workman class, Paul writes in 1 Cor. 3:16, 17: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” Expressing the thought of this temple of God being composed of living stones, Peter writes, “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. 2:5 As “living stones” we are now being chiseled and polished and being made ready for this glorious temple of God in glory. Peter admonishes (1 Pet. 2:4 Weymouth) “Come to Him, the living Stone, rejected indeed by men, but in God’s esteem chosen and valuable.” Thus we are urged to come to Him, the foundation or corner stone and to build upon Him. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:12

The “workman that needeth not to be ashamed” will build upon this true foundation with the proper materials—gold, silver and precious stones. This we must do daily, that the prophecy might be fulfilled in us: “The king’s daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework.” Psa. 45:13, 14 “In Raiment of needlework” refers to the white robe of his righteousness which our Lord furnished, upon which we are daily with great carefulness to embroider the beautiful adornments of Christian graces. “Her clothing is of wrought gold” indicates that those who have been daily diligent in the embroidery of their robes, shall be rewarded with the Divine nature. This then is the primary work we are to be engaged in on this side of the veil—the bride making herself ready.

As an adjunct to this primary work, as we let our light “so shine before men” we are privileged to assist in the call and development of this temple class—with loving care—helping one another with their glorious needlework. From the example set by the Apostles, we see this would also include the thought of being concerned for the spiritual well being of our brethren. For as we become acquainted with the writings of the apostles, it becomes clear that it did matter to them what their brethren believed and what they were being taught. Further, from the apostles example, we learn that they did not seek to rationalize inaction or compromise. Thus following their example, a faithful workman will be quick to come to the defense of the truth—spurred on not only by a love for the truth, but also by a love and concern for the Lord’s little ones. Having a proper concern for the spiritual well being of the brethren, a faithful workman will be very careful not to introduce any defiling errors to the temple class. If thus faithful as a “workman that needeth not to be ashamed” we shall be clothed with “wrought gold”—the divine nature.

In 2 Cor. 6:14-16 the Apostle admonishes this class: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” The Apostle John admonishes, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5:21) A “workman that needeth not to be ashamed” is one who heeds these admonitions; a workman that refrains from making idols of any kind: idols of home or family, idols of business, idols of leaders, and idols of organizations. We are told to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” (1 John 2:15) Our hearts are not to be set on these things. Rather our hearts are to be set on doing the Lord’s will.

In addition to being pictured as workmen, the followers of the Master are also referred to as soldiers who have enlisted in the cause of the “Captain of their salvation.” The picture of a soldier is a good one as it suggests many helpful thoughts. For instance: a soldier is expected to fight—to be engaged in warfare. He is expected to be properly conditioned for battle; and to wage a successful battle, a soldier must be properly equipped.

The Christian is admonished to “fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Tim. 6:12) He is to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3), that is, he is to be properly conditioned through a study of God’s word; and to “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Eph. 6:11) Thus he is to be properly equipped for the warfare.

Why is this so important? Verse 12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [heavenly] places.” As we study God’s word and become enlightened concerning the time features of his plan, we learn why it is so important, particularly at this time, to put on the whole armour of God. Concerning our day the Apostle wrote: “In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” (1 Tim. 4:1, 2) “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” (2 Tim. 4:3)

Our Lord in His great prophecy also saw our day and prophesied that there would be a great deception—“insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matt. 24:24) “Take unto you the whole armour of God [Paul says] that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.” We believe the evil day referred to is the Day of the Lord in which we are now living—the time when “Every man’s work shall be manifest; for the day shall declare it; because it is revealed by fire and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (1 Cor. 3:13) But the weapons we have been provided are equal to the

task—“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;—Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.” (2 Cor. 10:4, 5)

Thus a soldier who would be like the “workman that needeth not to be ashamed” must be a soldier having on the whole armour of God. How do we put on the whole armour of God? By diligently applying ourselves in a spirit of reverence to the study of God’s word to learn His will, his way, with a sincere desire to walk accordingly. Thus we receive the armour of God to protect us from the fiery darts of the adversary.

Returning to our text, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.”—certainly we all want to be such a workman. But notice the last phrase of our text—“rightly dividing the word of truth.” A workman that cannot rightly divide truth due to be understood during the time of his pilgrimage is indeed a shameful workman. He is like the soldier who goes forth to battle unprepared, with his armour either tarnished and ill fitting, or a portion of it missing. Such a soldier shortly would be overcome by his enemies.

The Apostle forewarned us of the time when many delusive forms of error would spring up in an attempt to deceive the very elect. “For this cause [because some received not the love of the truth] God shall send them strong delusion [permit some to come after the working of Satan—see verse 9], that they should believe a lie. That they all [those in the harvest time, who having been favored with a knowledge of the truth have failed to appreciate it] might be damned [condemned—judged to be unfit for the high calling] who believed not the truth.” (2 Thes. 2:11, 12)

What is a delusion? A delusion is an error. But more than that—it is an error which from certain standpoints has the appearance of truth. Consequently it is not something that is obviously error. If it were, it would not be a delusion—deceptive. The Apostle says “after the working of Satan” (vs. 9, 2 Thes. 2) What is the manner of the working of Satan? 2 Cor. 11:14: “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Which is to say that Satan is adept at making darkness to appear as light—error as truth.

When one is deluded, he really believes he is right. He may even be honest in his convictions and still be deluded. How often have we heard the statement in defense of such a one’s position—“But they are so sincere.” Prov. 16:25: “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

How may we escape these delusions? In Rom. 13:12 we read, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” It is described as the “armour of light” because only those who are fully

enlightened through a careful study of his word are able to put on the whole armour of God. Further describing this armour and its importance, Paul wrote in Eph 6:13-17: “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Because the errors are more subtle today than ever before, we must apply ourselves more diligently to the study of truth. Thus we take heed to our armour, that each piece is securely buckled on, polished and bright; that our loins are girded with truth—signifying that we are consecrated to the service of truth. Let us make certain that we are never engaged in the service of error. And let us retain the proper consecrated attitude—a spirit of service.

Let us continue to appreciate our breastplate of righteousness—the divine arrangement for our justification. And may the truth continue to have a cleansing, a purifying effect on our lives as we seek to develop a righteous character. And let us seek to have our “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” As this peace of God “which passeth all understanding” pervades our hearts, it will assist and comfort us over the rocky paths of trial and adversity. In addition we will seek to live peaceably with all men in so far as possible without compromising the truth.

And “above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Let us get a firm grip on the shield of faith. How can we do this? By a study of His Word. “His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” Psa. 91:4 If our faith be strong and sure we shall be overcomers. “This is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith.” (1 John 5:4)

“And take the helmet of salvation”—this is so important. What does it picture? The helmet of salvation represents our intellectual knowledge, our understanding of the Divine plan. This is especially important today. It is in harmony with the Apostle’s admonition to rightly divide the word of truth.

In Heb. 5 the Apostle is addressing his words to some brethren who were workmen that needed to be ashamed. Verse 12, Weymouth: “For although, considering the long time you have been believers, you ought now to be teachers of others, you really need someone to teach you over again the very rudiments of the truths of God, and you have come to require milk instead of solid food.” Verse 14: “But solid food is for adults—that is for those who through constant practice have their spiritual faculties carefully trained to distinguish good from evil”—meaning truth from error. Some are unable to properly

distinguish truth from error. Therefore, they are apt to be influenced in their doctrinal decisions either by personalities or organizations. Often times they will side with whichever viewpoint seems to be the most popular. Let us be of those who have the helmet of salvation—a keen understanding of the word of God—be able to masticate strong meat and discern truth from error. This is very important in the time we are now living.

These all constitute the armour for our defense. The only weapon for offense is the sword of the spirit. Let us make certain that it has a keen—a sharp edge; that we have a firm grip on the handle; that we become proficient in its use. Let us reply with “It is written”—“a pebble from the brook.”

What is the best way we can put on the “whole armour of God.”? Reprint 4930: “God seems to have greatly blessed and used in the ‘harvest’ work the six volumes of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES. Probably none who are today rejoicing in the truth would dissent from this statement in the slightest degree. Some we know would express the matter more strongly than this. Nevertheless every now and then we are brought to a realization that many of those who rejoice considerably in the truth have but an imperfect knowledge of it—they are not rooted, grounded, established and built up in the truth; they are not able to ‘rightly divide the Word of Truth’; they are not workmen who need never be ashamed in discussing the truth with others.

”Some of these, deficient in their knowledge of the Truth, are mere babes, beginners, who have not yet had a full opportunity for study. Some of them have read Vol. 1 and have skipped over the other volumes. They perhaps learned of the classes for Bible study, and, attending them and discussing with the brethren and hearing some discourses, seemed to assume that they knew the teachings of the entire six volumes as though they had read them, studied them.

“This is a great mistake... because we are in the time when each and all must expect to be specially tried and tested. And those who have only a partial understanding of the Divine Plan—those who have only a part of the provided armor, will find it difficult, if not impossible, to stand in this evil day the assaults of the world, the flesh and the adversary. If they have proper love for the Plan, they should manifest that zeal by thorough and persevering study of the volumes. They cannot afford to do less.

”We find also that some of the dear friends who read the SCRIPTURE STUDIES years ago, and not recently, imagine that they remember their contents, when in reality they are quite ignorant of many of their teachings. We all have leaky, earthen vessels and the precious treasure of divine truth soon exhausts unless we keep replenishing. One way of replenishing is to go to the Bible direct. But many have found what the Scriptures seem to imply, namely, that human teachers are necessary, and that they can get much more

knowledge of the Scriptures through the assistance of a teacher than they could obtain by their own energy. Such of our readers as have not read the STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES this year can scarcely appreciate how much they probably have lost of what they originally learned therein.”