

Study - Study - Study
by
Dr. Joel Minto

American Standard Version

2 Timothy 2:15 (ASV) Give diligence to present thyself unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.

The Complete Jewish Bible

2 Timothy 2:15 (CJB) Do all you can to present yourself to God as someone worthy of his approval, as a worker with no need to be ashamed, because he deals straightforwardly with the Word of the Truth.

Holman Christian Standard Bible

2 Timothy 2:15 (CSB) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

King James Version

2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

New American Standard Bible

2 Timothy 2:15 (NAS) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

New International Version

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

New Revised Standard

2 Timothy 2:15 (NRS) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Here are just 7 translations of the verse we all have grown up with over the years. Still I can find about 39 different translations of the same verse all claiming to be true to the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek; all grammatically correct; all understandable, while maintaining a word for word translation style. But which translation is correct or is it actually a compilation of all the translated texts?

Unfortunately Christian men and women these days are basically lazy.

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They would rather accept what is presented every Sunday as fact, rather than spend the time trying to understand the meaning of a particular text as the language and culture intended. In other words how did the original hearers of this verse understand what was said?

While this may seem overly harsh, it is not intended to be. Over the centuries the Christian Church has accepted and spread ideas and doctrines based on translations which reflected the current doctrinal stance or even the political persuasion of the translator. Now before you brand me as a heretic, please understand I am just trying to do what the lead verse in this article says. I want to be someone who correctly handles the Word of truth. But how do I go about that?

I would like you to begin a journey with me, one that I have been on for a while, a journey to better understand how God intends us to live with one another, and to show His love to others. You see the Bible as we call it, God's word is an instruction book on doing what is right before Him. It is not an intellectual exercise of my mind to understand God's word but it is the actual day to day living out our lives as examples before others. It is the difference between western thought and eastern thought.

These are very different worldviews and we in western society need to understand and see that the Word of God was written in the original languages of Eastern thought. Well you might ask why that is so important.

Reflect for a moment on the verse I began with.

How many of us see this verse as a command to go into the library or ones closet and ponder over the Holy Scriptures? For most of my life I would have to say I was one of those people. But is that what Paul is really telling Timothy to do? You see what we have done is apply our Greek thinking to what the writer is saying. Unfortunately Paul was not Greek he was Hebrew so we need to apply Hebrew thought to understand what Paul is saying.

Allow me to quote someone that has on many levels changed my way of thinking about Scripture. Dr. Skip Moen, says of this verse:

"With this in mind, let's examine the meaning of Paul's words *according to Paul in his context*. Notice that the test of proper handling of the word of truth is not the congregation, the cell group, the family or the educational examining committee. It is God. Whatever it means to rightly handle the truth, the audience who determines the outcome isn't human beings or the church. It is God alone. You and I (and Timothy) are expected to stand before Him and explain our right handling.

I suspect that we also need some contextual correction for the phrase "rightly handling." Paul's view of faithfulness is not about how much theological doctrine we know. His view of faithfulness is *living in accordance with divine instruction*.

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There is no point whatsoever to compiling religious *information* if it doesn't alter our behavior. For Paul, rightly handling is a statement about *application*. We can see this because Paul associates rightly handling with "no need to be ashamed." We know that the concept of shame in the first century Middle Eastern world is not about my *personal, inward self-affirmation*. Shame is a *public phenomenon*. To not be ashamed is to have a reputation of honor among those who observe *how I live*." Does that change your thinking on this verse? It should. So rightly handling doesn't mean go off and study and study until you understand, a cognitive function. What it means is we need to show this through a public way. So what do we show? We show and live out the instructions God has given us. So just what are those instructions? Perhaps I have piqued your interest to follow along as we together seek to understand and live out God's instructions. I would like us to start with the concept of world views....What are they? How do they shape us? Why is it important?

At the beginning of this short article, I began with a series of translations of a well-known verse. One we quote, and for us old timers it would be memorized and recalled in the King James Version. The obvious question would be which one I prescribe to and which would I recommend. All of them and none of them. If I was fluent in Aramaic and Greek and Hebrew that is what I would use and as we progress you will see why I answered the way I did. All of these languages and especially Hebrew are not languages where just a single word can be translated one for one. There are nuances and cultural limits that influence what was being written. Allow me to give you just a simple illustration of what I mean.....in the Eskimo language there are over 50 words for snow. That should not surprise us since snow is a very important aspect of an Eskimos life so one word could never describe all of the nuances. It is not just the Eskimo languages that have colorful terms to describe their frosty surroundings: The Sami people, who live in the northern tips of Scandinavia and Russia, use at least 180 words related to snow and ice. The Sami also have as many as 1,000 words for reindeer. These refer to such things as the reindeer's fitness ("leami" means a short, fat female reindeer), personality ("njirru" is an unmanageable female) and the shape of its antlers ("snarri" is a reindeer whose antlers are short and branched).

Why are there these nuances for a single word which we translate as snow or reindeer? Because they are integral parts of the lifestyle of these peoples and no one word can describe the speaker's intent. The same is true in the Eastern dialects from which our Bible today is translated. The translators get to pick and choose from a myriad of meanings based on context, known accepted meanings and even from the roots of words from other languages. A daunting task at the very least. But also a very easy way for doctrinal stances to creep into our English versions. This is why we need to be careful that what we read in our language is what God intended for us to see.

Will you join me on this journey? Let's discover and discuss and yes even debate how we ought to live and interact in a western civilization with our guide written in a culture and dialect foreign to us. Only through the help of the Holy Spirit can we discern what we need to know.