

Approved Workers **(2 Timothy 2:14-19)**

In Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus declared, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest.” There is a perpetual need for Christian workers—qualified, effective workers. While every Christian has been sent by God into the world, not every Christian goes. For this reason we must pray for workers. When Paul wrote to Timothy he exhorted his younger protégé to eagerly present himself to God as an approved worker. A Christian worker is, in simple terms, any believer who responds to God’s call to share Jesus Christ with others. We all, every one of us, must serve the Lord as everyday missionaries, workers in His harvest. God delights in us when we serve as tested and proven workers. Paul presents several characteristics of those who labor well for Jesus Christ.

Those who labor well for Jesus Christ will uphold God’s Word (2:14-15).

An approved Christian worker values the Scriptures and seeks to handle God’s Word skillfully. In contrast, many people become distracted and even derailed by petty quarrels.

Reject petty quarrels over useless and destructive words—stick to the truth (2:14).

Paul charged Timothy with the responsibility of continually reminding the church about the truth. He was to “warn” (an intensive term) the church in the presence of God to reject “word wars.” In 1 Timothy 6:4 Paul used the noun form of this term to describe the quarrelsome methods of false teachers. Such petty quarrels, Paul states, have no value and lead to the “destruction” (our word “catastrophe” comes from this term) of those who listen to such arguments. An effective Christian worker has no time for such useless and destructive words. We need to stick to the truth.

Work hard at presenting the truth of God accurately—cut it straight (2:15).

In contrast to false teachers who wrangle over petty nuances of thoughts and words, the true follower of Jesus Christ upholds “the word of truth.” Paul exhorted Timothy to “be eager” or “hasten” (the old translation “study” is too limited for this term) to seek divine approval. We want to present ourselves to God as those who have been tested and approved in the work. We want to be unashamed as Christian workers. Like a craftsman who prizes his masterpiece, so we as God’s workers should strive to present ourselves to God without embarrassment over our work. To be unashamed of our work for God, we must “rightly divide” or literally “cut straight” the word of truth. The Greek translation of Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5 uses this term to describe

cutting a straight path. The object of this effort is the “word of truth,” a phrase that Paul uses in Ephesians 1:13 and Colossian 1:5 to describe the gospel. The point that Paul is making is that an effective Christian worker will avoid petty arguments over false teaching and cut straight to the point of the gospel. We’ll handle God’s truth with respect and accuracy. We’ll cut it straight.

**Those who labor well for
Jesus Christ will resist false teaching (2:16-18).**

A second characteristic of an effective Christian worker involves our response to false teachers and false ideologies. We must resist such teachings, refuting error and upholding truth.

Avoid false teaching, which begins with irreverent and empty conversations (2:16).

It’s too easy to get caught up in debates about false ideas. Such debates often distract us from the truth of the gospel and lead nowhere. Paul told Timothy to “avoid,” literally “stand away from,” such matters. We’re to avoid “profane empty utterances” or conversations that have no substance and have no spiritual content. Paul has in mind the ideas of false teachers who promote increasing impiety. In other words, irreverent, empty ideas will only produce irreverent, empty hearts. We must guard our minds and hearts against the kind of talk that misses the truth of God.

Identify false teaching, which spreads like gangrene and destroys some people’s faith (2:17-18).

While we’re to avoid useless ideologies, we must be fully aware of their erroneous content. The words of false teachers, Paul warns, will “spread” (literally “pasture” or “feed”) like a flesh-eating gangrene or an aggressive cancer. Such is the nature of error. Paul identified two false teachers whom Timothy knew personally—Hymenaeus (mentioned also in 1 Timothy 1:20 as a blasphemer) and Philetus (otherwise unknown). According to Paul, these two men had “wandered from” the truth, literally having “missed the mark.” Specifically, they denied a future resurrection and had thereby overturned some people’s faith. What these men were likely teaching was an early form of Gnosticism, which denigrated physical matter and unduly elevated spiritual realities. They may have taught that the only resurrection was a spiritual rebirth and that the body counted for nothing. In 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 Paul, by contrast, stated that the physical resurrection of Jesus and therefore of Jesus’ followers is the very core of the Christian faith. Without a physical resurrection there is no hope or life. As workers for Jesus Christ, we must at times identify false teaching. In addition, we must constantly uphold the truth of God’s Word, thereby strengthening the faith of God’s people and making the gospel known to others.

**Those who labor well for
Jesus Christ will rely on God's support (2:19).**

Thankfully, Christian workers don't need to rely on their own strength to serve the Lord. We can stand on God's firm foundation.

God's work stands like a firm foundation (2:19a).

By way of encouragement to Timothy, Paul states that in contrast to the destructive efforts of false teachers the firm foundation of God stands. There is some question about what specifically Paul had in mind in referring to God's firm foundation. He may have been thinking of the influence of the first century apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:19), the church as the pillar of truth (1 Timothy 3:15), or the truth of the gospel message (2 Timothy 1:13-14). Broadly speaking, Paul may have been referring to all that encompasses God's work. God's work in this world will not crumble under the pressure of false teachers. His work is solid, a foundation on which we can stand with confidence.

God's people carry the seal of divine recognition (2:19b).

The work of God certainly includes the people of God. Paul says that God's firm foundation has a two-fold seal. First, "The Lord knows those who are his." This quote from the Greek translation of Numbers 16:5 relates to the rebellion against Moses by an Israelite named Korah, whom the earth swallowed up as a mark of God's judgment. Even in the face of false teachers, the people of God are secure. Second, "The ones naming the name of the lord must stand away from iniquity." Although not a direct quote from the Old Testament, this statement reflects God's warning to His people at the time of Korah's rebellion. The true believers of that day were to step away from rebellious Korah, to distinguish themselves as God's people in order to avoid Korah's judgment (compare Numbers 16:24). Paul assured Timothy that the Lord Jesus Christ knows His people and His people will stand out from the ever present false teachers who infiltrate the church. We can rely on God's support, standing on His firm foundation as Christian workers. We must uphold God's Word, resist false teaching, and rely on God's support. Accordingly, God delights in us when we serve as tested and proven workers.