

APPROVED OF GOD

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

Second Timothy 2:15

God has invested in each of us talents, gifts and ministries that He watches over to develop in our lives (Phil. 1:6). These *investments* are often perhaps the result of our prayers. We ask God to use us generally, in prayers such as- *“God have your way with me”, “Use me Lord for your glory!”* And He does. At times though we fail to recognise the little tasks that God assigns to us, in developing our heartfelt desire to be used of Him. By being faithful in the little things God is able to equip leaders for what others view as seemingly “overnight success”. In these lessons we hope to examine God’s Word to Timothy which is equally applicable to us. It involves five aspects that are vital for strong leadership preparation -

1. Faithfulness.
2. Diligence.
3. God’s approval.
4. A servant’s heart.
5. Prepared in the Word.

Faithfulness

Whether you believe in the *foreknowledge* or the *foreordination* of God, the Bible seems to present that every Christian is *conscripted* into God’s service. Anyone who is conscripted into an organisation might have the option after a period of time to opt out of that conscripted service. But not in God's Kingdom.

1. At the moment of being *voluntarily* conscripted, what must we do in accepting the LORD’s call to service? (Lk. 14:25-33)

2. What were the strong words of Christ to potential *conscripts*? (Lk. 9:62)

3. Based on Romans 11:29, for how long does God expect us to adhere to our conscription to His service? Does this mean that God must use us for the specific task that He has called us?

Faithfulness means commitment. It means there will be times when we feel like quitting, but we don't. It means there will be times when we make mistakes, and men will want to sack us from our service, but God won't. In fact all good leaders are leaders who have made (and learnt) from mistakes they have made.

4. Note some of the areas that it is easy to become either lazy or discouraged in that the Bible urges us to be faithful in -

a) Rom. 12:12

b) 3John 5

c) Rev. 13:10; 14:12

5. What else does faithfulness demand? In what circumstances?

a) 1Cor. 4:12

b) 2Tim. 2:3

c) 2Tim. 4:5

d) Heb. 12:7

6. What is one of the benefits of doing such? (2Tim. 2:12)

7. What is one of the blessings of faithfulness? (Prov. 28:20)

Faithfulness sets a person apart. It requires commitment and determination. It often means continuing on in a ministry or service for the LORD when no one appreciates our efforts. But to the *faithful* person this is irrelevant, because they look to have God's approval and blessing and not man's. God is looking for faithful people (Prov. 20:6). Let us count the cost and choose to be that people!

Amen.

GOD'S APPROVAL

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

Second Timothy 2:15

Faithfulness and diligence are necessities for a godly (God-pleasing) life. These terms need defining and qualifying.

1. Note what the following verses say about God's approval-

Romans 12:4 _____

First Corinthians 12:18 _____

First Corinthians 12:12 (vs. 22) _____



In a small European town lived an old violin teacher. One day a young boy commenced lessons. Unlike other boys, he diligently practiced everything the maestro taught him and soon became like a son to the old man. As the years went by the boy, who by this stage had grown into a man, became the best violinist in all Europe. This resulted continual requests for concerts from all over the world. The demands of touring meant that the old teacher and his star student lost contact with each other for

a long period of time. Then an opportunity came for the violinist to return to his hometown and play before his own people. On the night of the concert, the violinist arrived into town and was rushed to the concert hall to perform. As the curtain was raised, and many thousands of people sat transfixed on the great violinist, he paused before even playing a note. Scanning through the masses of the adoring audience, he eventually found the person he was looking for. Immediately he raised his violin in position, closed his eyes, and began to play. The audience was motionless as they were swept along with every bow of the violin.

Instantly they rose to their feet at the end of the item and loudly applauded. But the violinist was almost disinterested as he looked to the face of the old maestro. As the maestro smiled with approval, the violinist returned an acknowledging grin knowing that he had pleased the one person that really mattered.

2. As ministers, to whom do we look to for approval? (Rom. 14:18)

3. What are the conditions attached to this approval? (Rom. 14:16-17)

Not seeking God's approval in the ministry is not only foolish and futile, it is dangerous. When we are more concerned about what others think, than we are about what God thinks, we are venturing into treacherous waters.

4. What is the warning of Proverbs 29:25?

5. What does the Bible say the ministry of the Gospel is opposed to? (And who does it please?) (Gal. 1:10; 1Thess. 2:4)

While it is true that God looks to our hearts for our motives, it is also true that our actions reflect what is in our hearts (in much the same way that fruit on a tree indicates what type of tree it is, Matt. 7:15-20). Therefore Scripture rightly speaks of our deeds being judged by God (1Cor. 3:13).

Approval Demands Examination...

Many Christians fail to understand that they will be ultimately judged. Perhaps assuming that salvation means an escape from judgment, they may lazily choose to live a lukewarm spiritual life. While the Christian does escape condemning judgment, we are not exempt from examination judgment.

6. Knowing this, how does the Bible say we ought to live? (2Cor. 5:9-11)

7. In order to be judged and then rewarded, demands that we are examined. Note the following about God's ability to examine-

Matthew 12:36-37 _____

Psalm 94:11 (Matt. 9:4) _____

Romans 2:6 _____

Living with the knowledge that the LORD is examining us, causes us to respond by constantly examining ourselves (NB. 1Cor. 11:28). This is called *the fear of the Lord*. We must recognise as ministers of God we called to put God first and seek His approval rather than merely the approval of man.

8. How did Jesus say he wanted us to be received in heaven by God? (NB. 2Tim. 4:8; Matt. 25:21)

Amen.

BE DILIGENT

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

Second Timothy 2:15

In Paul's final words to Timothy, he shares with his young colleague some of the most important lessons that Paul himself had learnt throughout his ministry. These gems of godly wisdom from an elder statesman like Paul provide those of us who lack his experience to gain the benefit of many years of godly training without the pain of ignorantly stumbling on to them.

Not that Paul's words to us mean that we will never learn by mistakes, but it does provide us with the opportunity to learn both from his mistakes, and his experiences. (In fact this is the basic principle that applies to how we learn from anyone). How can a young person succeed in their ministry? Is it a matter of using all the latest gimmicks? Or perhaps administering an evangelism campaign of thousands of dollars? Maybe it is to be found in employing marketing tools to bring Church growth? Paul's prescription for ministry success is summed up in our text (2Tim. 2:15). While the thrust of this verse emphasizes *faithfulness*, the first component of this faithfulness is *diligence*.

Do Your Best

σπουδάζω - *Spoudazo!* This is the Greek word that Paul uses here which is variously translated as: *be diligent, endeavour, labour, study*. It comes from the root word *spoude* (spoo-day), which means *make haste, speed, eagerness, earnestness*. The servant of God must be diligently focussed on sharpening their skills for God's service.

1. In relation to making haste and being diligent, what does Scripture say in Ephesians 5:16, that can be applied here? (Col. 4:5)

2. The King James Translation translates *spoudazo* as "study". What relationship is there between time management (making haste) and study?

Making haste to be diligent is the instruction given to God's servant. It involves giving our best to God, not our "left-overs". Scripture consistently encourages giving God the "first" of our belongings, efforts, and life (Ex. 23:19; Lev. 9:15; Prov. 3:9). "First" in this instance equates to "best". Charles Finney wasn't always theologically astute, but his challenge to his listeners about giving God the first of their lives is worth considering: "*Do you spend more time preparing your outward appearance for Church, than you do praying for the Church service?*", he would ask. As the servants of God we must make sacrifices to give God our best.

3. What kind of sacrifices does the servant of God have to make to be diligent for God and His service?

While the context of our text is in relation to the Word of God, the servant of God must be diligent in the other areas involved in Christian ministry.

4. What did the apostles say to the people in Acts 6:1-4 (especially vs. 4)? Therefore, what areas of ministry is the servant of God to be diligent in?

5. What advice does Ecclesiastes 9:10(a) give to God's servant?

PRAYER

Our instructions for service come from our Master. These times of instruction are received in our prayer closet (Matthew 6:6). While prayer is a time to request things from God, it is also a time to *seek* God. We recall our Lord's time here on earth. He was constantly praying to His Father (Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12; Jn. 17:9).

6. What did Jesus teach His disciples to do in Luke 18:1?

THE WORD

As we have stated about the text, diligence in this sense refers to our labour in God's Word. The King James Version translates the verse by saying that the servant of God needs to *study to show thyself approved*. God's servant needs to be studying the Word of God.

7. Note the following about God's Word, and what we should do about it -

a) Ps. 119:9

b) Ps. 119:11

c) Ps. 119:16

d) Ps. 119:133

Our wisdom is useless. We need God's wisdom. This wisdom is revealed in God's Word. The servant of God must be equipped with a knowledge of God's Word, so that their wisdom is that of the Word of God (Prov. 4:1-7). This can only happen when the servant of God seeks the wisdom and instruction of God through prayer and the Word of God. This is where the Christian worker needs diligence. God grant us the grace to be diligent for Him.

Amen.

NO NEED FOR SHAME

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

Second Timothy 2:15

As leaders we are to be faithful to God. In this Scripture passage we have studied what Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, advised Timothy. Faithfulness includes diligence, and a recognition that we must serve God before ourselves or others. Scripture sees God’s approval as the goal of our ministry. Men may criticise or reject our ministry, but if we have faithfully honoured and obeyed God, then we will have His approval. Yet, in the midst of serving God we are surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ who can keep us in check.

1. Note Romans 14:18. When our ministry is acceptable to God, how do our spiritual peers respond toward us?

2. Although we are called to serve God, who are we accountable to? (2Cor. 8:21)

God has placed us in the midst of brethren who can point out to us our weaknesses and bring correction. While none of us likes correction, we all *need* it. The text says “*does not need to be ashamed...*” Let’s reflect on this choice of words for a moment.

3. What is the difference between “shame” and “guilt”?

A man with no friends who lives an isolated life in a wilderness can feel guilty, but never feel shame. Shame comes from the disapproval of others. God’s servant is subject firstly to the approval of God, but then to the approval of their brethren.

4. Note what Scripture says about the “approval” of brethren -

a) Prov. 12:1

b) Prov. 12:16

c) Prov. 13:18

d) Prov. 15:5

e) Prov. 19:27

f) Prov. 28:23

While we need the correction of our spiritual peers, we also need their support and encouragement. If all we ever did was to act as spiritual police toward our brothers and sisters, we would all most probably lose heart. This goes doubly for those in leadership. Because of their general prominence, they are more susceptible to criticism and especially discouragement from others.

5. What role does the Scripture say that other brethren play in observing the ministry of another? (1Cor. 14:29)

6. But was the purpose of such observation and ministry? (1Cor. 14:31)

7. What are we all told to do, and why? (Heb. 3:13)

Leaders need both encouraging and correcting. They need to be reminded that while they are shepherds of God’s flock, like Christ who is the Great Shepherd, they are also sheep, like Christ is also the Lamb of God.

Amen.