

A Workman Approved of God

Catechism Season

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 2:15

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The Scripture reading this afternoon is found in the second letter to Timothy, the second epistle of Timothy, chapter 2. Let me read the entire chapter. Our text is from in verse 15. 2 Timothy 2,

1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. 3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. 5 And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. 6 The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. 7 Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: 9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. 10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: 12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: 13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. 15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. 17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The

Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. 24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, 25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

That part we read in God's holy and inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this afternoon is found in 2 Timothy 2:15. In light of the Catechism Season and schooling season beginning once again, we consider 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, the question that we ought to ask ourselves this afternoon is: are we workers that are approved in God's sight? Are we workers that have nothing to be ashamed of? The text that we consider this afternoon is an admonition to apply ourselves to be faithful workers in Christ's kingdom. Of course, the wicked of the world will encourage one another to be diligent in their labors. Anybody can go to someone, an unbeliever can go to another unbeliever and encourage them to be diligent in their labors but all that diligence which the world may encourage one another to do, all that diligence is self-serving. The Holy Spirit has a completely different starting point and that starting point is the precious blood of Jesus Christ by which we have been ransomed from death. We have been set free from the bondage of sin that we might be, as the inspired apostle said in 2 Timothy 2:21, that we might "be vessels unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use," that is fitting for the master's use, "and prepared unto every good work." The motivation, beloved, that we need to have when we consider diligence and faithfulness in our labors, the motivation is all about thankfulness. Thankfulness to God for what he has done for us. More than that, the possibility of serving our Lord and Master is only the grace that Jesus Christ purchased for us through his work.

As we being a new Catechism Season, it's good for us to be reminded that God calls us to be faithful workers. It's true. We ought to note that these words, the words of our text, were written first of all to Pastor Timothy. Timothy was a pastor in the church of Ephesus and those words apply in particular to him. The apostle writes to Timothy and yet we all

understand that these words don't only apply to Timothy, they apply to every minister of the Gospel. Everyone who has been called to preach the Gospel, these words are written to them but moreover, these words also apply to each and every one of us. Each and every one who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ must hear the admonition of our text. Even though we know this epistle was written particularly to Timothy, the principles in the epistle certainly apply to more than just Timothy. We said they apply to pastors but they apply to all of us. I'll give an example that's very clear: 1 Timothy 6:11, there we read these words, "But thou, O man of God," this was written directly to Timothy, "flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." That was written to Timothy but it applies to ministers and it applies to each and every one of us and so also the text. When the Holy Spirit says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," that speaks to all of us. It speaks to pastors first and foremost. It does. We know that. But it also speaks to elders and to deacons. It speaks to teachers and to students. It speaks to husbands and wives as well as to those who are single. It speaks to parents as well as children. You and I, beloved, are workers. We are workers and the question is: are we workers approved of God? It's my prayer that as we consider these words we would all be encouraged to apply ourselves to that goal this Catechism Season but also into the future. Not to obtain the praise of men for ourselves but that God may be praised who is our faithful Savior.

Let's consider the text under the theme of workman approved of God or a worker approved of God. What's that phrase means in the first place and secondly the manner in which we are to pursue that goal and lastly, the reason to seek that goal. A workman approved of God. The inspired apostle tells us in our text "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." That word for "workman" in the original Greek comes from the same root where we get our word "energy" from. A workman, then, is someone who gives themselves, who applies energy, who expends energy to accomplish a certain work. Timothy must seek to be a worker who has nothing to be ashamed of.

What kind of work is the inspired apostle talking about? Is he talking about any old work? Is he talking about anybody and any work circumstance? If we looked at this epistle, we could point to verse after verse that makes it exceedingly clear what kind of work the Holy Spirit is talking about. If you read through the epistle and it's not long, you could do that in one evening easily, you would find many references to the kind of work that Timothy was to involve himself in. But no verse, perhaps, is more clear than chapter 4 of this letter. 2 Timothy 4:2 is this admonition to Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 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; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." Timothy must be about the work of the ministry, that is, the work of preaching of the word of Jesus Christ .

Now, we all understand, beloved, when the inspired apostle says to Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God," he's not telling Timothy to ignore every other work that we need to engage in. The inspired apostle is not telling Timothy to ignore eating and drinking to stay alive. He wasn't asking Timothy to abandon his wife and family, assuming he had a family. But the most important work for Timothy was to do the work of the ministry. The most important work for a minister of the Gospel is to do the work of the ministry. Ministers of the Gospel need that kind of devotion to Jesus Christ. There is no other work that ought to get in the way of that work of Jesus Christ. Not that they must avoid every other work. Ministers of the Gospel still must be fathers and husbands in their houses. They still have to eat and drink and so on and so forth. But those labors must not hinder the work of the ministry. Every other work, in fact, ought to further the goal of being a workman in the ministry. In some way, they ought to serve that one goal.

2 Timothy 2:4, the same chapter, we read that principle. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Well, that's the principle that applies certainly to ministers who have been chosen, as it were, to be soldiers to fight the good fight of faith. They must not entangle themselves in the affairs of this life. The inspired apostle is concerned especially with Timothy and other ministers; they must do the work set before them by Jesus Christ. They must preach the Gospel to the glory of God. How necessary it is not then that we pray for our ministers that God would grant them the grace that they would be faithful workmen, workmen approved of God who have nothing to be ashamed of? How necessary that we pray for our ministers.

But beloved, the principle of our text applies to more than just ministers because ministers are not the only workers in Christ's kingdom. You and I, all of us, who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ are workers. Not workers in the same sense as ministers, not as directly perhaps as ministers but workers nevertheless. Fathers in the workplace. Mothers in the home. Teachers and students in the Catechism class. Employers and employees. Wherever God in his providence places us in whatever station and calling, we are workers. Each and every one of us is called to work to the glory of God. Even in something as mundane as eating and drinking. What does the Holy Spirit tell us? "Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do it all to the glory of God." I must see myself as a workman of God but all of us must see ourselves as workers of Jesus Christ.

The inspired apostle saw that Timothy was a workman of Jesus Christ but he also recognized that Timothy could easily fall into the trap of serving the wrong master. Paul knew that Timothy might want to be a man-pleaser; he might do what he did, he might teach whatever taught, he might do so to please men instead of God. After all, Timothy was not some kind of super-human above all the temptations of the flesh. Timothy, just like all of us, was affected by opinions, by the pressure around him. Peer pressure is not just something that affects teenagers, peer pressure affects every single one of us and that's why the inspired apostle warned Timothy throughout the letter. He warns him about that in 2 Timothy 1:8, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor

of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." The inspired apostle wouldn't have to say that to Timothy if there was no temptation to be ashamed. Timothy was a man just like we are, human creatures. There was a temptation to draw back from the work. As if to say to Timothy in that verse, "Timothy, there are going to be sufferings. There are going to be persecutions. There are going to be afflictions. Perilous times will come. Some will even be in prison. Some will even die for the sake of the work that God calls them to do but don't let that keep you, Timothy, from preaching the truth of the Gospel." Ministers must not allow the fear of men to affect them in the work that Jesus Christ sets before them because that would be to serve the wrong master.

Again, this does not only apply to ministers. Ministers are not the only ones who are tempted to be men-pleasers. Have you ever been afraid, beloved, to do the right thing? To do what Jesus Christ calls you to do because you knew it would cause you to be ridiculed? Because you knew it would have consequences? Think about when someone takes the Lord's name in vain in front of us and we are afraid to deal with that in a proper, God-honoring way. We are afraid to tell them that that is offensive to God. How often do we do that? Or those in the workplace. Are you tempted to look the other way when your employer is being dishonest? When you know if you try to do something about that dishonesty it may mean your very job? There are all kinds of ways in which we show the fear of men.

We tend to be men-pleasers. Why is that? Because we all have the old man that clings to us. We selfishly want the favor and praise of others. Ultimately, we are all self-pleasers. We work for selfish reasons. That selfishness can show itself in a number of ways. It might show itself in laziness. Thinking about the Catechism Season that lies ahead of us, our selfishness may show itself in laziness, thinking only about my ease and my comfort. Then we say to ourselves, "Well, I deserve a life of ease and hard work is not part of the equation." That's selfishness. But selfishness might also show itself in a life of working long, hard hours. You might work those long, hard hours and we might be workaholics in order that we may enjoy the so-called good life. We spend long hours maybe to escape the duties that God calls us to do at home. We spend long hours at work. Or we might spend long hours at work so that we serve ourselves; we want to obtain the money that we may buy those expensive toys and vacations to serve ourselves. Other times our work may be not to obtain physical goods but maybe for the praise and approval of others. Our hard work feeds our selfish pride. No matter who we are, beloved, whether we are ministers, parents, students, teachers, employers, employees, we all have to deal with that old man of sin, that selfish old man.

Then the warning comes to us that we have to work for the right reason. The verse that we consider is not just an admonition to work hard because we might be working hard for all the wrong reasons. Two people can do the very same work also. As far as the outward work is performed, two people might do the exact same thing outwardly and yet one of them is doing that work for themselves, maybe even committing a horrible abomination before God and another may do the same thing and yet that work is pleasing to God. I want to give an example of that. For example, the work of praying. Proverbs 28:9 says

this, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Even his prayer shall be abomination, someone who prays beautiful words of praise for God. His prayer shall be abomination if it does not proceed from faith; if it is not performed according to the law of God; if it was not done to the glory of God. His prayer shall be abomination. It has the outward form of godliness but it's done purely for selfish reasons. That's what the writer of Proverbs is talking about, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law," he hates God. He hates God's law. Why is he praying? He's praying to impress others. Whatever his motivation, his prayer, think of the Pharisee praying before standing up in front of all those in the temple there, even his prayer shall be abomination. Think of the revulsion that God has towards the politician, for example, who calls a prayer meeting or who prays in public and yet who has hatred to God in his heart. He prays out loud so that everyone will see him and so he can get for himself the Christian vote. His prayer is abomination to God.

I say we need to do the work that we do, we need to be diligent for the right reason because by nature, we don't have the right reason. By nature, we serve ourselves. By nature, we hate the work that God sets before us to do. That's why Timothy needed to hear the words of our text; that's why ministers of the Gospel need to hear these words; that's why Catechism students need to hear these words. We all need to hear these words because by nature, we don't want to work for the right reason. By nature, we want to work for selfish reasons. Whether ministers of elders or deacons or fathers, mothers, children, students, teachers, it's in our nature to work for the wrong reason.

But notice what the inspired apostle says to Timothy. He doesn't say to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved in your own eyes." He doesn't say to Timothy, "Timothy, the only opinion that matters is your opinion. Make sure that you are happy with yourself." He doesn't say that. Nor does he say, "Study to show thyself approved to me," that is, the Apostle Paul. He doesn't say that to Timothy. "Make sure that I approve of you or that other apostles approve of you." He doesn't say, "Study to be approved by your congregation." And he doesn't say, "Study to show thyself approved unto your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice." He doesn't say that. He says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God." Unto God. "Timothy, you will be tested by various circumstances and trials in your ministry. You will be tempted to refuse the hard work that is set before you. You will be tempted to compromise the work because of persecution and affliction and trouble but when that happens, Timothy, be sure that you remain true to God. Remain true to God. Study to show thyself approved unto God. Put yourself at God's disposal as his worker."

He uses the words of Romans 6 and this applies to every child of God. Romans 6:13, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Yield yourselves unto God. That's the same words although they are translated differently in our text but the same words in the original Greek, "Yield yourselves unto God. Show thyself unto God. Show thyself a workman approved to God."

I need to ask myself, beloved, and you need to ask yourselves too that question: am I a worker approved of God? Am I working as a worker of Jesus Christ or am I working for myself? We need to work for the right reason. We need to seek to be workers approved of God. What is the manner in which we ought to move toward that goal of being workman approved of God? One word expresses that at the beginning of our text: study. Study to show thyself approved unto God. Literally that word "study" means "to proceed quickly; to hasten; to hurry." I pronounce the word in the Greek because when I do, you will see how it sounds like the word "speed," *spoudazo*. The idea is "speed towards the goal," and when somebody does that, when somebody speeds, when they hasten towards the goal, it shows an attitude in their heart that shows an eagerness, it shows a conscientiousness to apply themselves towards that goal. "Study to show thyself approved unto God." That's what Timothy ought to do, take every effort to reach the goal of being a worker approved of God. That's what every minister of the Gospel ought to do. That's what all of us ought to do. To take every effort, to be eager and zealous to show ourselves approved unto God.

But isn't that, beloved, exactly the opposite of what we want to do by nature? Is it not the case that we want to do and take the easy way? If I have the choice of reading Scripture and meditating upon Scripture and reading the Standard Bearer and the Beacon Lights or some other spiritual literature, what does my flesh say? Is that something easy? Is it something that comes easily to us? My flesh says just the opposite, "You're tired. Take a break. Watch a video. Play a game. Read the newspaper. Take a nap." By nature, we don't hasten towards the goal, in fact, we want to do just enough to get by. Just enough to get by. A minister with that kind of attitude will be easily diverted from doing the work that Christ sets before him. An elder or a deacon can easily find many other things to do besides the work of his office. Fathers and mothers might easily slack off the duties that God sets before you to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Catechism students might do just enough, might learn their lesson just well enough to get by in class.

The truth is, beloved, none of us would strive in even the slightest measure. None of us would strive in the direction of seeking to be faithful workers in Christ's kingdom without God's grace. None of us would. That's why the inspired apostle tells Timothy in this very same chapter, 2 Timothy 2:1, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In other words, we cannot do what we are called to do apart from God's grace. Jesus himself says, "Without me ye can do nothing." Well, somebody said, "If it's all a matter of grace, then what's the use of telling us to be strong in the grace? Are you telling us that there is something about our free will now that we are the ones who demand that grace and we get that grace for ourselves when we want it? How can we decide to be strong in grace if we need the grace even to make that effort? Even to seek grace if we need grace? How can we decide to be strong in grace?" The answer to that objection, beloved, is that whenever God demands us, his redeemed people, when he demands those things of us, he also gives us the grace that we need. He strengthens us to do it by his Holy Spirit. Then somebody says, "If it's the Spirit who strengthens us to do in anyway, why do we need these admonitions? Why do we need to be told to study? To hasten? To be eager?" Well, the reason, beloved, is

that God uses, the Holy Spirit uses, these very admonitions. The Spirit of God uses those admonitions and then he teaches us inwardly.

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That's similar to what the apostle says earlier in this letter. 2 Timothy 1:14, "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." By the Holy Ghost, in other words, by the grace of the Holy Ghost keep that, guard it. Guard that good thing which was committed unto thee by the Holy Ghost. We find that same truth echoed in our canons. I'm not going to read that at this time but had 3 and 4 Article 17 where it says, "Grace is conferred by means of admonitions."

So too with this admonition this afternoon, the Holy Spirit admonishes us in his word. He inspired this very word that is written here before us. He inspired that word and now he brings it to our consciences and the Spirit applies it to our hearts. Study, be diligent to work toward that goal of being a faithful worker. Why do we need to work toward that goal? Because none of us is as faithful as we ought to be. Who can say, "I am a faithful worker in Christ's kingdom? I am a workman approved unto God? I am a workman that needeth not to be ashamed"? Who can say that? None of us is as faithful as we ought to be. We all have a small beginning.

Why must we work toward that goal? Because, beloved, we don't know where God will call us to serve him in the future. Thinking about Catechism instruction, that's a means that God is using to prepare our young people for the future. Young men, you don't know how God will use you in the future. You don't know if God might call you to be a minister of the Gospel or an elder or a deacon and that Catechism instruction is preparing you for that calling. God may call some of you to be Christian school teachers and we need those. God probably will call you to be fathers and mothers, husbands and wives. Catechism instruction will serve as a means to prepare you and we need preparation. We need to be prepared for what lies ahead.

How must we seek to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed? The inspired apostle adds these words, "rightly dividing the word of truth." Rightly dividing the word of truth. Ministers of the Gospel must rightly divide, literally must cut a straight path. That's the word used in the original, "must cut a straight path." They must faithfully instruct from God's word. They must not turn to the right hand or to the left. They must cut a straight path. They must teach God's word, not quoting one or two isolated passages but taking the whole of Scripture to show that this is what God teaches. Ministers who want to be faithful workmen must rightly divide the word of truth; they must study that word; they must apply themselves to understand that word. Then they must teach faithfully out of that word.

Now somebody asks, "That applies to ministers and we can see how a minister must faithfully instruct. How does that apply to the rest of us?" All of us, beloved, must rightly divide the word of truth. All of us must take God's word and apply it to every circumstance that we face in this life. If we want to be workers for Christ who are faithful, workers that need not be ashamed and we want to apply all of God's word,

fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, when God's word gives instruction as to how to be faithful in that station and calling, we need to rightly divide the word of truth. When it gives instruction to employers. I heard a sermon not so long ago giving specific instructions to employers. God's word is practical. We need to know how to rightly divide the word of truth, to apply it to every circumstance. How to speak to others. How do we speak to others when we want to tell them our opinion? How do we do that in a way that glorifies God? God's word gives principles that we might apply to every circumstance of life.

What's the reason we ought to study to show ourselves approved unto God? Is not the reason, beloved, thankfulness to God? Jesus Christ gave himself for us. You could say he was a worker of God. He did the work of God like none other. He gave his own life in order to redeem us from sin and death. And if we are truly thankful for that and we're never thankful enough, but if we are truly thankful for that, we will want to give honor and glory to him. We will want to show our thankfulness. Our tendency, our old nature, wants to do the work for selfish purposes. If a minister preaches the Gospel for selfish purposes, that's an abomination unto God. If a father or mother or husband or wife do what they do, if a worker or an employer does what they do for selfish purposes, that is not pleasing to God. We ought to do what we do out of thankfulness that we might give honor and glory to God.

Why must we seek to be faithful workers in Christ's kingdom? Then we come to an even greater reason than that, that to glorify God: there is no greater reason, beloved. But as a child seeks to be pleasing to their father and mother, we who are children of God want to be pleasing to God. We want to do those things that are pleasing to God and not every work that we do is approved of God. David's sin with Bathsheba was not pleasing to God in any way, shape or form. But those works, again, that are done according to God's law to his glory and proceed from faith, those are pleasing to God. We come back to the principle that an outward work in and by itself. Take the outward form: that's not what's pleasing to God but what is the motivation. What is the motivation.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." That's our goal. That no one can say, "Look at all that sin," and there is always sin mixed with what we do but our goal is to flee from sin and follow after God. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God for his name's sake." May God grant that. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we confess that we fall far short of doing the works that thou dost call us to do. As ministers, as fathers, as mothers, students, employees, employers, thou knowest, Father, all the circumstances. Thou knowest how we so often fail to work for the right reason. Thou knowest how selfish we are in our hearts. Father, we pray that this coming Catechism Season, this year and in the future, that each and every one of us would give ourselves to do the works that thou hast set before us, not to please ourselves, not to gain the praise of men but that thy name would be honored and glorified. We cannot do this in our own strength, Father, we pray thou wouldst give to us a conscious dependence upon thee. Grant that we may consciously see our need of thy grace and then may we be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. May we depend

*upon thee to walk in thy ways. Go with us now, we pray. Bless us in this coming week.
Prosper the cause of thy kingdom. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*