

God Said It; I Believe It; That Settles It – 2Timothy 2:15

Scripture Reading: 2Timothy 2:8-26

Introduction

I recently purchased a table saw for my workshop and have been spending some time learning about how to use it effectively and safely

Just to look at it, a table saw is a pretty simple piece of machinery but, apparently, it can be quite dangerous if used improperly

For instance, when one sets up a table saw it's important to make certain the fence along which the wood rides is perfectly parallel with the blade or else the wood could pinch the blade and that could lead to a catastrophic accident if the wood were to kick back and hit the operator

There are many things like that to consider for safe operation of the table saw like having the proper blade height and having a blade guard properly installed and the use of push sticks, feather-boards, and so forth

It would be foolish and dangerous to simply walk up to a table saw, turn it on, and start cutting without having a good working knowledge of how to use it safely

This morning, we are beginning a new sermon series called "Beyond the Bumper Stickers" with a look at a common cliché concerning our attitude toward the Bible – "God said it' I believe it; that settles it."

On its face, that saying seems perfectly appropriate but it can be quite dangerous for us if it leads us to have a cavalier attitude toward what God actually says in his written Word

Our passage from 2Timothy indicates in verse 15 (**2Tim 2:15**) that there is a "right" way to handle God's Word so, by simple deduction, we know that it's possible to handle the Bible in the wrong way

And, sadly, many people – including many faithful believers – do just that when they forget that handling the bible is serious business

I. Handling the Bible is Serious Business

It seems like I may have used this illustration before or perhaps you've heard the story elsewhere of the man, who thinking he could use some guidance from the Bible, opened it to a page at random, jabbed his finger down onto the page and read: "Judas went out and hanged himself." The man thought, "That can't be right," so he tried again and this time he read, "Go and do thou likewise." Sweating a little bit but wanting to believe it was some sort of mistake, he tried a third time only to read, "What you are going to do, do it quickly."

That's an obviously humorous story but it does serve to illustrate how dangerous it can be to use the Bible incorrectly because handling the Bible really is serious business

Turn with me to **Hebrews 4:12** and follow along as I read it because you are going to want to connect it with the passage in 2Timothy –

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Only a fool would handle a sharp, two-edged sword carelessly or casually

As some of you know, I whittle for a hobby and whittling involves using very sharp knives and gouges to shape wood

I have yet to cut myself very badly because I take handling the tools very seriously and I wear a protective, cut-resistant glove on the hand that holds the wood and I make certain to always keep my body parts out of the path of the blade

But, whereas whittling or using a table saw carelessly or thoughtlessly could result in a spoiled workpiece or the shedding of the user's blood, mishandling the Word of God can have serious, negative, spiritual repercussions

In **verses 8-10** the apostle Paul states that the Word of God contains the gospel message by which people can obtain salvation in Christ Jesus

Then, in verse 14 (**2Tim 2:14**) he says that misuse of the Bible can “ruin” people and the Greek word translated as “ruin” carries the connotation of destruction or catastrophe

In fact, Peter uses the same word in **2Peter 2:16** where he describes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

In our target verse, **2Timothy 2:15**, Paul indicates that shame might well be the condition of someone who handles God’s Word incorrectly and in verse 16 (**2Tim 2:16**) that people will be led deeper into ungodliness

Notice that the way this warning is worded indicates that it’s possible to use God’s Word to advance or make progress into more and more ungodliness

In verse 17 (**2Tim 2:17**) he further states that such misuse will spread like gangrene and, in verse 18 (**2Tim 2:18**) that the faith of some will be upset and in verse 23 (**2Tim 2:23**) that such misuse will lead to quarrels

Simply put, the Bible is as dangerous as a two-edged sword and mishandling it isn’t a benign thing – in the wrong hands or when used improperly it actually has the capacity to destroy people

And Paul was warning his young friend to remember this truth personally and to remind everyone in the church about it

Since I imagine none of us want to be guilty of mishandling the Bible let’s consider two common ways that lead us to handle the Bible wrongly that we might avoid them

II. Two Ways of Wrongly Handling the Bible

The first thing that causes many of us to mishandle the Word of truth is not actually knowing what it says

A. Not knowing what it says

While it’s true that there are those who deliberately set out to misuse the Bible in order to lead others astray, I doubt whether that activity is present very often in true believers

What I believe happens more often is what we see Paul proclaim in verse 18 (**2Tim 2:18**) about Hymenaeus and Philetus who he says “swerved from the truth”

In the original Greek, the word translated as “swerved” means “to miss the mark” or “to deviate” without implying or charging deliberateness –

But, still, the swerving of those two men were causing problems in the church by upsetting the faith of some people in the church

What those two may have done is what many still do today and that is they might well have read a verse in the Bible and assumed the verse revealed all the truth about a matter and they ran with it

After all, Paul had written to the Colossians (**Colossians 3:1**) the following words:

If then you have been raised with Christ...

So they had support for their position that the resurrection had already happened and there was to be no future resurrection

Sadly, they only had part of the truth because they didn’t consider passages like **1Corinthians 15:12-19** where Paul wrote:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Had they done so, they would have recognized that Paul was speaking in the Colossians passage in terms of an “already but not yet” scenario that is so certain of a future event it is as if it has already happened

God’s Word isn’t a collection of random sayings or teachings – it is a unified whole and all of its parts have to be considered within the context of the entire Bible

Rarely is any truth found entirely in one verse alone without any support in other verses and, often, those other passages introduce nuance or details from a different perspective that combine with all the other passages to make a complete picture

So when we read a verse or a teaching and pluck it out of the context of the entire Bible we run the risk of swerving from the truth

That’s not to say that anything we read in the Bible is false but any particular passage may present only a partial truth that needs to be fully formed by combining it with the whole counsel of God’s Word

Let’s consider one more teaching really quickly that serves to illustrate this point

I mentioned Judas in my humorous illustration so let’s consider how Judas actually died

In **Matthew 27:5** we read that he went out and hanged himself out of remorse from having betrayed Jesus

Then in **Acts 1:18** we read it reported that Judas fell headlong and his body burst open

Reading either of those passages without reading the other leaves the reader with an incomplete picture as we only understand that Matthew related the method of Judas’ death while Luke fleshed out the complete horror of Judas’ bloated, decaying body breaking free and falling down to burst on the ground

How Judas died is a relatively minor example but you can easily see how depending too much on a particular passage or verse can lead us to have a skewed picture of the complete truth of God’s Word

And heresy always begins with someone having a skewed picture of the truth and all enticing error contains a kernel of truth or else it wouldn’t be enticing

That’s why Paul tells us in **Romans 12:2** to *“be transformed by the renewal of [our minds], that by testing [we] may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Notice what Paul says there when he says we can determine what is good, acceptable, and perfect by *testing* and *discernment*

Christianity is not a mindless religion that requires us to just blindly accept what we are told and God expects us to have questions and doubts – even about the things we read in the Bible

But he expects us to doubt our doubts as much as we doubt his Word and to spend the time needed to investigate our questions thoroughly – to test and discern – so that we might be assured as to what is good, acceptable, and perfect

Trust me in this, God’s Word can withstand your skepticism and your questions

So go ahead and ask your questions and satisfy your doubts and make certain you know what the Bible says

Not knowing what the Bible says leads to mishandling the Word of truth but so is not doing what it says

B. Not doing what it says

If you spend much time in spiritual chatrooms on the internet you will come across people who are very knowledgeable about the Bible and like to argue

I’ve even left pastor’s groups on Facebook because the only thing the participants seem to be interested in is showing how much they know about esoteric things and proving themselves right on some obscure technicality

I think it's that kind of behavior that Paul warns us against in verse 14 (**2Tim 2:14**) and in verse 16 (**2Tim 2:16**) and again in verse 23 (**2Tim 2:23**)

I can't think of a better way to put what so often takes place online than "quarrels about words" and "irreverent babble" and "foolish, ignorant controversies" that breed quarrels

Now, we need to understand what Paul *isn't* saying here because it's very important

Paul isn't saying that words don't matter and that we don't need to pay attention to the precise language found in God's Word

That's why I always look to the original languages when I'm studying because I want to understand the entire nuance that the English translation doesn't necessarily convey readily

Words and their meanings matter a great deal and we need to study thoroughly in order to be certain we know what the Bible says – as we just took time to explore

But I have to tell you something very important and you might want to write it down and refer to it the next time you find yourself in one of those foolish, ignorant controversial quarrels about words

What the regular, every-day Christ-follower can understand and apply from Scripture is far more important than what the intellectuals choose to argue about

The Bible contains a wealth of knowledge that can't be known from any other source – it's God's special revelation to mankind

But God didn't give us his written Word simply so we might be more knowledgeable – he gave us his Word so that by putting into practice what we read in its pages we might be changed and conformed to the image of his Son

I have often been amazed when someone asks me to teach on a particular topic or to do a study on a particular book of the Bible and I've asked them why they wanted me to do so

Because almost invariably, the answer had been some version of "So I know what it says" implying the gaining of intellectual knowledge without a thought to application of that knowledge

Now, maybe I tend to read too much into those answers but I would like to hear someone say "I want to use what I learn to please God"

Knowledge without obedience will lead to judgment as we read in **James 4:17** so James encourages Christ-followers to be doers and not just hearers of the Word in **James 1:22**

Again, God didn't provide us with his Word to make us smarter but to make us more like his Son so to use the Bible to merely gain knowledge without seeking to apply it to our lives is to mishandle the Word of God

Knowing *and* doing are both important and necessary if we want to avoid mishandling the Bible

Next, I want to show you two very important things that rightly handling the Word of God requires

III. Rightly Handling the Bible Requires:

The first thing required is the right relationship

A. The right relationship

Without a doubt, unbelievers can benefit somewhat from what they read in the Bible

After all, as we read in **2Timothy 3:15** the Bible is "*able to make [a person] wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ*"

While God's general revelation we see all around us in nature tells us a great deal about God and makes mankind without excuse, one cannot know the way to salvation without the benefit of God's written word

Still, I believe that only a Christ-follower can rightly handle the Word of truth because the Bible was written primarily for the benefit of believers

Only a believer can approach the Bible in the way God means for it to be approached – not as a book of wise saying or as a rule book but as the Word of God that reveals Christ to us and shows us how to become like him

And that simply isn't possible before someone comes to a saving knowledge of Christ because we can't know God's truth as he reveals it in the Bible until we belong to God

1Corinthians 2:14 makes this clear –

The natural [or unsaved] person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to enable the reader to evaluate the meaning of the text correctly so that he or she can accept and properly apply the text to his or her life

I've heard it said that reading the Bible before being saved is like reading someone else's mail – and that's a pretty good way to put it I think – it could be meaningful in some way but not in the same way as if your name was on it

We need to understand, though, that being a believer and having the Holy Spirit dwell within us doesn't mean that the meaning of a passage automatically clear to us

And if we want to handle God's Word rightly we have to have the right motivation

B. The right motivation

When it comes to understanding the Bible, God expects us to think and work our way to the truth

In other words, God expects us to use the brains he gave us and to put forth the necessary effort to come to a correct understanding of his Word

We can't approach the Bible with a lazy attitude and expect revelation to come from a casual reading of it and to overcome laziness requires motivation

We do well to think of the role of the Holy Spirit more as illumination that guides us to discern the truth rather than revelation that provides us with the truth

For that reason, we always need to be aware of unique interpretations – whether they are ours or someone else's – things that no one else has seen – because they aren't from the Holy Spirit

The Bible is God's special revelation to mankind and the Holy Spirit's role isn't to give us new revelation but to awaken us to the truth the Bible contains and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not a substitute for proper study

Anyone who wants to handle God's Word rightly must be willing to engage in industrious, systematic study of the Bible

We can't just open the Bible at random and stab our finger onto the page and expect great insight to come from the Holy Spirit

Just think of how the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors to write the Bible

He didn't dictate to them word for word and directly instruct as to where to put each jot and tittle but, rather, he used each author's unique personality and then caused them to write the words of Scripture as they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (**2Peter 1:21**)

The authors still had to put pen to paper and express themselves and we must likewise put our own efforts into studying what they have written and that requires us to be motivated to learn so we can become more like Christ

That's likely our first motivation but there is a second motivation for rightly handling God's Word that arises as we become more like Christ and we find it in verses 24-26 (**2Tim 2:24-26**) – for the benefit of others

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Rightly handling the Word of truth and having an accurate understanding will enable the Christ-follower to be masterful in expounding the truth of God's Word to others in a calm, rational way with patience

And they will consequently lead others into the truth that God has illuminated to them for their betterment – our text says that those they teach will “come to their senses” and “escape the snare of the devil”

Proper understanding that enables one to be more like Christ and the ability to help others do likewise should motivate any true Christ-follower to seek to handle God's Word properly

Conclusion

“God said it; I believe it; that settles it” isn't necessarily a “bad” or “wrong” saying but, as we are going to see is true of many of the “Christian clichés” we are going to look at in this series, it is overly simplistic and kind of incomplete

Without going into more explanation it can seem as though Christianity is a mindless faith that simply goes along without question and God doesn't mean for it to be like that at all

God doesn't expect us to approach his written Word without questions because having questions, and even a modicum of skepticism, is often necessary to motivate us to do the work that we must do to come to a proper understanding

Careful, industrious, systematic study has inspired believers through the centuries to seek and acquire a deeper faith

Not only can the Bible withstand our questions, the Bible actually pleads to be understood, defended, applied, and shared by God's people

Because, when God's people truly understand and accept what they find in the Bible, they will change the world for God's glory

And that's what we're here for

Let's pray

2Timothy 2:8-26 (page 995)

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.