

Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed

INTRO: Good morning everyone. If you are one of our regulars, you know we have been going through a series on salvation. Last week we just got started on how we respond to God's grace, and we have two more weeks on our response. However, because we planned to make this AWANA Sunday, I wanted to interrupt the series to have a message that would be focused more for the kids in the AWANA group.

Many of you may know AWANA's motto: Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed. It comes from 2 Timothy 2:15, so I want us to start there.

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

I. The meaning of the verse

A. The phrase "do your best" is put in there because of the idea of the verse - its context

1. The original word in Greek means "be eager" or "be zealous"
2. So the verse is telling us that it is a good thing to be excited and passionate to be to be presenting yourself to God...
 - a) And that passion can often be lacking in today's church
 - b) The drive, the desire, the all consuming passion to present ourselves before God
 - (1) In fact, we often have the exact opposite, we are afraid of presenting ourselves before God
 - (2) Usually because
 - (a) We do not know about God's grace and love
 - (b) Or because we do not really believe in God's love for us
 - (c) Or/and because we know that we are not really passionately pursuing Him, we seek lesser things in life, or worse yet, sinful things and we feel ashamed to seek after God

B. The next phrase is important in the verse "as one approved"

1. The Greek word means "tested"
2. The idea is that you have worked hard, you have been through the battle and you were tested and came through with flying colors
 - a) So for example, when you try out for a part in the play, and they approve you to take a singing role - you have been tested and approved
 - b) They have checked out what you can do, and found you ready to go!
3. We need more people that are tested and approved

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- a) Many have been tested and approved in the sense that that have placed their trust in Christ
 - (1) God has said, “Yes, that is my Child”
 - (2) He has given as a guarantee the deposit of the Holy Spirit
 - (3) So in that way they have been tested and approved
- b) What I mean by having more people that are tested and approved is that we have more people that have stood their ground for their faith
 - (1) They have faced the difficult battle with today’s modern ideas
 - (2) They have faced the ridicule and name calling
 - (3) Even sacrificing parts of their lives - their money, relationships, status, job promotions, dreams, etc
 - (4) Sadly, many Christians today fold under the pressure rather than stand the test
 - (a) They give in to conforming their beliefs to the current trend
 - (b) They give in rather than allowing facing the pain of sacrifice
 - (5) What we need are people that are willing to stand
 - (a) Which requires the wisdom to know which battles need to be fought, and which battles to leave alone
 - (b) And it requires a commitment to Christ that says, “I want Christ’s approval rather than the world’s”s
- C. The rest of the verse let’s us know what you are being tested in
 - 1. You are a worker
 - a) And let’s stop there
 - b) This is one of those things that us as the older generation need to pass on to the younger generation
 - (1) You are always actively involved in life - what you work at you work hard at
 - (2) But more than that, when you are working you are working for the Lord
 - (a) Even if you are not at church, you are working for the Lord
 - (b) Even if you are playing with friends - you are doing it for the Lord
 - (c) If you ask to help with VBS or work in the nursery, or help with a meal, or anything else you do at church - you do it for the Lord
 - c) The other part to your being a worker is - you are a WORKER
 - (1) If you are a Christian you are an active participant in God’s work
 - (a) There is no “Plan B”
 - (b) God chose you, conformed you to the image of His Son, and prepared “good works for you in advance for you to do”

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- i) Does that sound like you are passive?
 - ii) Does that sound like you get to retire?
 - iii) Absolutely not
 - (1) We all have a work, a job, a ministry to do
 - (2) We are all workers
 - d) The reason you do not need to be ashamed is because you have already been tested and tried - you have been found to be a good worker that makes God proud
- 2. The final part of the verse is that you are correctly able to handle the Word of truth
 - a) There is a word picture here that means to make straight lines
 - b) So I need one of you guys as a volunteer
 - (1) Now let's suppose that we blindfold you right now (blindfold)
 - (2) Now I spin you around, and tell you that your goal is to walk back out of the sanctuary
 - (3) How important will it be for someone to help you make a straight line for the door?
 - (a) How would you feel if the person you trust gives you bad directions?
 - (b) What would happen to you?
 - c) So, back to the verse, it says you are able to handle the Word of God correctly - or make straight paths from the Word of God
 - (1) In other words, you know what the Bible says so you can understand it, and explain it to others
 - (2) You are capable of making straight paths with the Word of God
- D. This is a great lesson for all of us
 - 1. The Word of God is going to give us straight lines and solid advice
 - a) Too many people want to rely on their own abilities to make heads or tails of life
 - b) They want to make their own paths, but the problem is they are just as blindfolded and dizzy as _____
 - c) So they can't do it
 - d) It is when we get into God's Word that He helps us straighten the path
 - (1) Anyone ever memorize Psalm 119:105 "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" - So God's Word helps turn on the lights for us to know right from wrong, a good path from a bad path

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- (2) How about Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”
 - (a) So God, when we trust in Him, and in His Word, and DON’T rely on our brains, God makes our paths straight
- 2. And the great thing about God’s Word is it is always straight
 - a) And what I mean is it tells us the things we like to hear
 - (1) The God is love
 - (2) God is forgiving
 - (3) That God will give us strength
 - b) But it also will tell us things that we don’t want to hear
 - (1) That we are sinners
 - (2) That specific things in our lives are not pleasing to God
 - (3) That we need a Savior
 - c) The Bible does not sugarcoat things - it is straight, honest and true
- E. But let me take you to another passage that helps you understand today and why you work so hard all year - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- II. These verses tell us so much about why you do the things you do to learn God’s Word - to be workmen that are not ashamed
 - A. It says that you are running for a prize
 - 1. Now today we gave out awards for all of your hard work all year long
 - 2. I still have my awards from when I was in AWANA back when the dinosaur was the family pet
 - B. It even tells us that we are supposed to run in a way as to get the prize
 - 1. The Bible is pushing us on to win - to get the award in the end
 - 2. God wants us to strive to be the best we can be
 - C. Let me point out one thing about the awards and about the competition
 - 1. The awards for winning a running race will not last
 - a) Back when the Bible was written the prize for the winner was a crown with leaves all around it
 - (1) It was called a laurel wreath
 - (2) It was made from branches of an evergreen tree (like our Christmas trees - only with wide leaves instead of skinny, pointy needles)
 - b) Now, do you think that a crown like that would last very long after you cut the branches off the tree?
 - (1) No, of course not
 - 2. But that is what their award was - a crown made from tree branches, and it would never last

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- a) It's like many ladies I have heard in my life that tell me that they don't like getting flowers
- b) They die and then they get sad - that was the prize they would get, something that would die
- 3. That is like our awards today
 - a) They are much better than tree branches
 - b) But will they last forever?
 - c) No, they will not last forever - the awards we get for doing our books at AWANA, and memorizing verses will eventually break, or rust, or fall apart at some point
- 4. But there is something about this competition that is different
 - a) It is not just a race for a crown of tree leaves, or trophies, or ribbons
 - b) The verses tell us that there is a prize that will last forever
- D. There are four prizes that will last forever and these are listed in order of importance
 - 1. First is a deeper knowledge of the Bible
 - a) When we study God's Word, we come to understand it better and better
 - b) And that is a great thing - sometimes
 - (1) There is a story told of a man that was thrown in prison and the only possession he was given was a Bible to read
 - (2) He was in prison his entire life, and eventually died in prison
 - (3) When the guards came to remove his body, they found notes that the man left behind about what he read in the Bible
 - (a) He noted the middle word of the whole Bible
 - (b) He told how many words were in each book of the Bible
 - (c) He knew the longest word and the shortest word of the Bible
 - (4) Basically he spent his entire life with the Bible, and missed the whole point of the Bible
 - c) So when we study the Bible, we can gain a deeper understanding, and that can be a very good thing, if we allow the Bible to change us with its message
 - 2. Second, is the character that we gain from studying God's Word
 - a) I doubt that there is anyone in history that would argue that genuine Christians are people of great character
 - b) There are some that claim Christianity but do not live it - because they never allowed the message to penetrate their heart
 - c) Anyone that has allowed the message to penetrate their heart has become a better person for it
 - (1) They come to understand what love is, what it looks like

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- (2) They come to know better how to love their wives, because they see how Christ loved the church - and they strive to emulate that
- (3) They come to see how to rear children with godly discipline, patience and love
- (4) The message changes their heart and behavior
- 3. Third prize we gain that lasts forever is knowing, and accepting salvation
 - a) The Bible's aim is not to merely transform our behavior, it is to transform our hearts and by extension, our lives
 - b) When we study God's Word we learn of our problem with sin
 - (1) That we are a slave to sin, that it has ruined our lives, and it will continue to drive us down the wrong path in life
 - c) When we understand our problem with sin, we begin to see God's solution to sin - Jesus Christ
 - (1) We read not just about His life and teachings - great though they are
 - (2) But we read about His sacrifice for us
 - (a) How God in human form, Jesus, became sin for us
 - (b) So we could take on His righteousness
 - d) When we understand what Christ did for us, and the exchange He made for us, we begin to see the benefits
 - (1) The benefit of being His child
 - (2) The benefit of receiving His righteousness so we can stand before a holy God
 - (3) The benefit having our place reserved in heaven
 - (4) And the benefit of having a restored relationship with God
 - (a) Which leads to the last prize
- 4. The final prize that lasts for ever - we get God!
 - a) We don't just get God's stuff
 - b) We don't just get a city made of gold
 - c) We don't just get a remade earth
 - d) We get God
 - (1) A fully restore, no sin hindering relationship with the One that loved us so much He pursued us
 - (2) The One that loved us so much He did not think it anything to give up heaven to come to earth and be one of us
 - (3) The One that said I would rather go through hell for you than spend an eternity in heaven without you

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- E. Now I am going to guess here that most of us, if not all of us would say that these eternal benefits are of FAR greater worth than some temporary award
 - 1. Those athletes back in ancient times worked so hard, putting their bodies through so much, pushing themselves to the limits to get a crown that would wear out
 - 2. We, when we take 2 Timothy 2:15 seriously, work hard to show ourselves approved
 - a) We have a passion for God's Word
 - b) We desire to handle it well for our lives and for the lives of others
 - c) We push ourselves to the limits to earn awards that last forever
- F. And of course, the final question is are you doing it, and if you are, will you continue
 - 1. If you are not pushing yourself to be this kind of workman, why not?
 - a) What is holding you back?
 - b) What is keeping you from pursuing God through His Word this way?
 - 2. If you are pushing yourself, will you keep going?
 - a) The deeper you go with God, the more you find
 - b) The further the path you walk with Him, the more you find you want to keep the journey going
- G. So we are all left with a choice: to study to show ourselves approved, or not to
 - 1. Given all the eternal benefits, I have to say I think it is a fool's choice to not seek to be that approved work that does not need to be ashamed.