

God's Unashamed Workman

Endeavor to present yourself to God qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15, Concordant Version, revised).

God's saints are immutably set as a seal upon His glory. They are the fruit of His affection. They were chosen in His Beloved. Love led them into the son's place long before they lived. Nothing can add to their perfect acceptance in His Christ. This is not our subject, yet we wish to guard our words, lest anyone should think they infringed upon this glorious truth. We may not work for acquittal; that is God's gift. Nothing that we can do can make peace with Him, for He is already conciliated.

But there is work to do. God speaks of it in various ways. He needs heralds, teachers, soldiers, workmen. The herald proclaims peace to God's enemies, so that they receive the conciliation. The teacher opens up the riches of God's words to His saints. The soldier keeps free from entanglement with the occupations of the civilian, which would hinder effective service, and so pleases the One under Whom he has enlisted.

But the workman, what does he do? Can he please God, too? Yes, but in a different way. When his work is finished, it will be inspected by his Master and his greatest joy will be the smile of His approval. If it has not been executed so as to merit a "well-done!" he will be ashamed. No wonder we are exhorted to do our utmost to avoid disgrace! No wonder we are urged to do our very best to gain God's positive approval of our work! Right glad will we be to find our imperfect portions burn, that nothing but perfection may remain.

How are we to make sure of His approval? His answer is, by "correctly cutting the word of truth." "But," we hear many exclaim, "surely it does not say that we are to cut up the Scriptures! They are a unit." True, they are a living whole, yet, unless they are properly divided, their very unity will cause confusion.

Let us get on the track of this expression "correctly cutting" (*orthotomounta*) and see if we can trace its meaning by its usage. As it is used only in this one instance in the Greek Scriptures, we turn to the LXX, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, and find that it is used to translate the Hebrew word *ishr*, STRAIGHT, in only two of its many occurrences. In Proverbs 3:6 the Hebrew and the Greek renderings read:

(Hb.) And He will be *straightening* your paths.

(Gr.) In order that it (*fem.*) may be *correctly cutting* your paths.

And in Proverbs 11:5 they read:

(Hb.) The righteousness of the sincere *shall be straightening* his paths.

(Gr.) The righteousness of the flawless is *correctly cutting* paths.

A later translator, Symmachus, however, changes *correctly cutting* to *straightening*, in Proverbs 3:6, in order to agree with the Hebrew. This shows that it is not an exact rendering. This is confirmed by the fact that the Hebrew word is usually translated by the Greek word for *straightening*, in its literal usage. These examples, therefore, do not prove that *correctly cutting* means to *straighten*. Indeed, how could we *straighten* the word of truth?

Nevertheless, in these two passages we have the key to its significance. In both cases it is used of *roads*. To straighten a road in Palestine, where the surface is so uneven, would involve much cutting of earth and rock. I have seen this myself in Jerusalem. King George the Fifth avenue, for instance, though on a comparatively level slope, needed considerable grading. I watched them cutting one of the approaches to it. Thus we can see why the translators chose *correctly cutting* when *straightening* was used of roads. That was the usual way in which they were straightened. How rare straight streets were in ancient times may be inferred from the fact that one street in Damascus (which is quite level) was so called to distinguish it from the rest (Acts 9:11). I found the modern street of that name was *not* perfectly straight,

for one cannot see the end, as it is around a bend.

It is clear, then, that this word actually means *correctly cut*, and is figuratively applied to our dealings with the truth. The context makes this plain. Hymeneus and Philetus cut the truth *incorrectly*. Resurrection is a great truth. As to *time* it must be cut so that our Lord's rising is in the past, the saints' will be at His presence, and the rest at the judgment. In these "cuttings" resurrection takes placè. We cannot take resurrection as a whole, uncut, and put it either in the past or in the future. We must cut it and put part in the past, and the rest in the future. So with all truth. It must be partitioned or divided as to time and place. If we fail to do this it will subvert our own faith and lead others into error (2 Tim. 2:18).

Many who read these lines are doubtless workmen. Let them consider this truth from their own standpoint. Would their master be pleased to find them failing to properly apportion the material for their daily task?

Will the carpenter choose lumber which has been laid aside as too green for any use, to finish the vestibule of a palace? Yet we filch from Israel, laid aside for the present, to build the entrance into the church.

Will the painter, because he knows that yellow, blue, and red contain all colors, mix them together to get white, which has all colors? He will get black, not white. Yet we, knowing that God is light, refuse to use the prism of His Word and see its separate glories; but mixing all these colors into one, we get confusion, blackness.

How long would a jailer hold his job if he persistently refused to give each man his proper sentence, but gave everyone a life sentence? Yet who has any conscience about applying "everlasting punishment" to the whole race, even though God restricts it to the living nations which stand before the Son of Man at His unveiling?

What would become of the bookkeeper who muddles the various invoices so that he could not tell to whom totally different items had been shipped? We, worse than that, refuse God's accurate record of the dispensa-

tion of His costly merchandise. We lay claim to many items which are not sent to us. They are on His records as sent to others. They still bear the labels which give their proper destination.

What mechanic, when putting together a new piece of machinery, does not carefully notice every number, every hint, as to the proper location and setting of every part? But we give little heed to God's own plain markings, showing how He has adjusted the vast complex machine which works incessantly to produce His glory.

In all these things the workman is told, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead." And we would say to all who value the great Master's approval: "Be sure you have correctly cut the word of truth—the only valid instructions He has given to carry on His work—then go ahead." A single piece of work which lights up His eye is worth infinitely more than a life's work fit for nothing but the flames.

Let us, then, refuse to confuse God's dealings during the eons or ages (wrongly spoken of as eternal, for ever, etc.) with His grand purpose, and its accomplishment *after* the eons (or "evers") are over.

Let us heed the broad distinctions between God's administrations which are intended to restore the earth, and His present grace, which has the reconciliation of the heavens as its object. Paul's epistles alone are for the present. Nowhere else can we find the transcendent truth which applies to us, during Israel's temporary apostasy. The old prophets and apostles, yes, even our Lord Himself—all were ministers of the Circumcision. They proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom which shall displace the kingdoms of this earth, and rule its peoples righteously. Paul proclaims a heavenly realm, in which His sway extends to the limits of the universe.

May God ever give us grace to "correctly cut" His precious truth!

A. E. K.

Concordant Publishing Concern
P.O. Box 449
Almont, Michigan 48003
