

## *Handle the Word of Truth Accurately*

Last lesson we studied 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and learned that the Word of God is authoritative, necessary and sufficient for all matters of life and faith, including business. A major theme of this letter from Paul to Timothy is that the treasure of God's Word must be guarded and that the response of faithful men to attacks and challenges to God's Word is to gently and patiently teach the truth, instead of arguing about what is not true. In business situations, this means to first see what God's Word says instead of being drawn into problem solving the world's way. This requires diligence and the ability to handle the Word of truth accurately.

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God  
as a workman who does not need to be ashamed,  
handling accurately the word of truth.*

*2 Timothy 2:15*

If there is an accurate, right way to handle the Word of truth, then there are also inaccurate, wrong ways to handle the Word of truth.

Accurate Bible handling is both an art and a science. It is a science in that there are proven methods and techniques to learn and follow. It is an art in that one gets better at it with practice and experience.

When we say that we interpret the Bible literally, it means that we look for the plain, straightforward meaning of the text based on its context. All literature derives its meaning from its context. For example, if the context of a verse is an historical narrative, then we interpret the verse as a factual account of what happened, not as a fairy tale or mythical story. On the other hand, if the context is poetic literature, we interpret the language in its figurative sense.

Do you need a seminary degree to accurately handle God's Word? No you do not. God promises to equip us to do whatever He calls us to do, but He also said that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 13:21; 11:6)

In this lesson we will discover and practice principles from God's Word regarding how to accurately handle God's Word.

**2 Peter 1:19-2:1**

1:19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2:1 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

**OBSERVE**

To study something accurately means to correctly get the right meaning from what you are studying. Is there only one right answer to what the Word of God means, or is everyone's approach and opinions equally valid? Lets discover what God's answer is to this question.

*Leader, read CONTEXT box and then read 2 Peter 1:19-2:1 and have the group say aloud and mark "prophetic word" and "prophecy of Scripture" and "prophecy." Take a minute to answer the discussion questions.*

CONTEXT
The theme of 2 Peter is to be diligent in knowing the truth, to be diligent against false teachers, and to be diligent in preparing for Jesus' return. In these verses Peter, an apostle and eyewitness to the transfiguration and God's audible proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God, writes that the Scriptures, the written Word of God, is more sure, more trustworthy, more reliable than even his personal experiences. He goes on to warn that false teachers introduce their own interpretations over the written Word of God.

**DISCUSS**

Based on these verses, are all opinions about what the Word of God means equally valid? Why?

How does this truth apply to the accurate handling of God's Word?

**Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32**

4:2 You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

12:32 Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add or take away from it.

**Mark 10:2-9**

2 And some Pharisees came up to Him, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife.

3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

4 And they said, "Moses permitted a man to WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY.

5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

6 But from the beginning of creation, GOD MADE THEM MALE AND

**OBSERVE**

All errors in Bible interpretation result in one of two things being done to God's Word. Look for these "two things" in these two passages.

*Leader: Read aloud Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32. Then ask the he group to go back and find and mark the "two things" not to do.*

**DISCUSS**

What are the two things we are not to do when we handle the Word of truth?

Based on these verses, why is this important to God?

**OBSERVE**

We are going to do a mini-topical study on what the Bible teaches about divorce to discover and illustrate principles of Bible study and interpretation. The focus of our observations and discussion will be on how to accurately handle God's Word rather than the teaching on divorce. It will take self-discipline to keep our focus!

We will be looking at a discussion that Jesus, the Master Teacher, had with the Pharisees about divorce. In this discourse we find several important Bible study principles as we compare and contrast Jesus' handling of the Word and the Pharisees mishandling of the Word.

*Leader: Read the INSIGHT box, then Mark 10:2-9 and have the group say aloud and mark "divorce," "separate," and "adultery." The words in small caps is how this translation indicates a quotation from the OT in the NT.*

<b>INSIGHT</b>
<p>"No fault" divorces of convenience had become the practice of Jewish society during Jesus' day. It had become common practice for men to divorce their first wives in order to marry younger women, to treat marriage and divorce as a religious cover for a promiscuous lifestyle.</p>

FEMALE.

7 FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE  
HIS FATHER AND MOTHER,

8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE  
FLESH, CONSEQUENTLY THEY ARE NO  
LONGER TWO, BUT ONE FLESH.

9 What therefore God has joined  
together, let no man separate.

10 And in the house the disciples  
began questioning Him about this  
again.

11 And He said to them, "Whoever  
divorces his wife and marries  
another woman commits adultery  
against her;

12 and if she herself divorces her  
husband and marries another man,  
she is committing adultery.

#### Deuteronomy 24:1-4

1 When a man takes a wife and  
marries her, and it happens that she  
finds no favor in his eyes because  
he has found some indecency in  
her, and he writes her a certificate  
of divorce and puts it in her hand  
and sends her out from his house,  
2 and she leaves his house and  
goes and becomes another man's  
wife,  
3 and if the latter husband turns  
against her and writes her a

These Pharisees thought they had Jesus trapped in a "no win" situation. They thought Jesus either had to agree with them and condone these liberal divorce practices, or contradict the Mosaic Law.

### DISCUSS

Looking at the sequence of the discussion, in verse 3 how did Jesus respond to their question whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

The Pharisees responded confidently that Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away. How did Jesus respond to this? Take a couple of minutes and list everything you learn about marriage and divorce from this passage.

### OBSERVE

Jesus did not dispute the Pharisees' claim that Moses commanded a man to write out a certificate of divorce before sending his wife away. But He did explain the reason, or the context, of the command. Let's look up the command in the Old Testament that the Pharisees were referencing.

*Leader: Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and have the group say aloud and mark "divorce" and "adultery."*

certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife,  
4 then her former husband is not allowed to take her again because she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.

**Exodus 20:14**

14 You shall not commit adultery.

**Ephesians 5:31-32**

31 FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

**Matthew 5:31-32**

31 And it was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce';

32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except for the cause of unchastity commits adultery.

**DISCUSS**

Look closely at the Deuteronomy passage. What is the command and why?

**OBSERVE**

Lets look as some other verses to understand why God refers to these divorce practices as an abomination

*Leader: Read Exodus 20:14 and Ephesians 5:31-32 and have the group say aloud and mark "adultery".*

Do you see why these practices described in Deuteronomy 24 are called an abomination before the Lord? Explain.

**INSIGHT**

Leviticus 20:10 clearly states that the penalty for adultery under Mosaic Law was death. Thus, the "indecency" mentioned in Deuteronomy is not sexual immorality, but rather some deficiency in the eyes of her husband. The purpose of the certificate of divorce was not to facilitate or promote these unbiblical divorces, but on the contrary, to inhibit and slow the process down, to discourage it, and most importantly, to protect the innocent women so that they could legitimately marry again.

**OBSERVE**

Psalm 119:130 says "The unfolding of Thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." Do you see how we are unfolding the full counsel of God's Word on this subject of divorce? Lets keep going, but keep the pace brisk. Again, our objective is to discover techniques and principles for inductive Bible study.

*Leader: Read Matthew 5:31-32, 1 Corinthians 7:12, 14, 15 and Malachi 2:15-16 and have the group say aloud and mark "divorce" and send her "away."*

**1 Corinthians 7:12, 14, 15**

12 ... if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away.

14 ... *for* the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise the children are unclean, but now they are holy.

15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

**Malachi 2:15-16**

15 Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.

16 "For I hate divorce," says the Lord ...

**Matthew 15:7-9**

7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you saying,

8 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.

9 But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men.'"

What additional instruction do we receive from these verses on divorce?

Did the Pharisees handle the Word of truth accurately or inaccurately? Did they add to or take away from the Word of God? Explain.

**OBSERVE**

The Pharisees had codified their interpretations and applications of the Scripture, and taught these to the people. This is what Jesus is referring to in Matthew 5:31-32 when He contrasts "and it was said" with "but I say."

*Leader: Read aloud Matthew 15:7-9.*

**DISCUSS**

Based on this passage, what should we not be teaching? Why?

Summarize in this chart what you've learned about the accurate and inaccurate way to handle God's Word from this mini-topical study on divorce.

Accurate	Inaccurate

**1 Corinthians 2:12-14**

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,

13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

**John 16:13,14**

13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth ...

14 "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.

**OBSERVE**

Accurate handling of God's Word requires something even more foundational than the "art and science" that we have been studying. Lets look at a couple of final passages that identify what this is.

*Leader: Read 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 and John 16:13,14, and have the group say aloud and mark "Holy Spirit" and any personal pronouns.*

**DISCUSS**

What is that "something more" required for accurate Bible handling?

How does the Holy Spirit help us handle the Word of truth?

## WRAP IT UP

This is a list of the truths that we discovered inductively from God's Word:

- There is **no private interpretation** of God's Word. Our task in Bible study is to discover what He said and meant.
- There is a **right and a wrong way to handle the Word of God**, a method and technique that must be learned and practiced. Some of the principles are:
  - Always begin Bible study with prayer to ask the Holy Spirit for understanding and application.
  - Do not look for verses to support your interpretation, but rather study the verses to discover God's meaning and make that your interpretation.
  - Context always rules in interpretation.
  - Interpret Scripture with Scripture, not with traditions or opinions of men.
  - Seek the full counsel of God's Word. Look up all the verses that speak, in context, to a particular topic. Emphasize what God emphasizes. Do not base your interpretation and application on obscure, difficult to understand passages, but on what is plainly and directly taught.
  - Study the details – word definitions and grammar matter.

## BUSINESS APPLICATION

The Word of God should be life-changing. Here are some application questions to discuss, time-permitting, and certainly to reflect upon privately.

- Based on this study, what will you do differently when you handle God's Word in the future? When are you going to practice these principles? Are you interested in additional training?
- Has God spoken to your heart today about any "private interpretations" that you have made regarding biblical teaching that has made you uncomfortable? Have you justified questionable business practices based on the wisdom of man instead of the wisdom of God? If so, confess, repent and study to show yourself approved to God.

Recommended resources:

[How to Study Your Bible](#), by Kay Arthur

[How to Understand Your Bible](#), by T. Norton Sterrett

Precept Ministries International: [www.precept.org](http://www.precept.org)