

PAUL'S SWAN SONG

Accurately Handling the Word

2 Timothy 2:14–19

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In 1787, John Rippon published what would become one of the most theologically sound and encouragement-filled hymns of his century—and ours. The hymn was “How Firm a Foundation.” Just read the first stanza:

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

This little stanza echoes the inspired truth penned by the apostle Paul almost two millennia ago, when he wrote:

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

and . . .

But God's truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and “All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil.” (2:19)



DIGGING DEEPER

Searching the Scriptures Tip

Commentaries—good ones—offer facets of knowledge to assist readers in magnifying aspects of the biblical text, including historical context, canonical principles, language helps, and the protestant tradition of interpreting a given passage.

Quotable

*In spite of what
you're dealing with,
no matter where
the government is
going—no matter
how difficult the
economy and whatever
the scuttlebutt may be
in your neighborhood
or around the office
or in the school
where you attend—
nevertheless,
God's foundation
stands firm. The
Lord knows those
who are His.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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You can augment your study of 2 Timothy with Chuck Swindoll's *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* from the *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary* series. This approachable commentary is packed with the theological depth and practical application you've come to expect from Chuck.

 **It's All Greek to Me: New Testament Word Study**

During the course of Chuck's message, he touches on the meaning of the Greek word, *orthotomeō*. "See the words 'accurately handling'? It is rendered in the King James, 'rightly dividing,' but the Greek term . . . literally means 'to cut straight.'" How did Chuck derive this definition—was it from comparing several Bible versions or from his knowledge of Koine Greek or from something else? In Chuck's *Insights* commentary, he digs deeper and reveals his word-study process.

Let's take a look at how he conducts a word study.

EXCURSUS: THE MEANING OF ORTHOTOMEŌ IN 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

For as long as I can remember, expositors have taken 2 Timothy 2:15 as their mandate to study the Scriptures in order to discern their precise meaning, and then to preach them accordingly. But that may not have been all that the apostle had in mind with this verse. Don't misunderstand; expository preaching—the diligent study, accurate interpretation, and effective communication of God's Word—lies at the heart of pastoral ministry. There can be no substitute. However, Paul may have been driving toward a deeper aspect of pastoral ministry: personal integrity.

The Greek verb translated "accurately handling" is *orthotomeō*, which literally means "to cut straight" but can have one of two possible metaphorical uses. The first, which most translations of 2 Timothy 2:15 prefer, is "to expertly and correctly handle." By application, this would mean "understanding the word of truth correctly and then preaching it properly." But the evidence for this interpretation is virtually nonexistent.

The evidence is much stronger in support of another figurative meaning: "to put into practice" or "to make what is theoretical a practical reality." Interestingly, the verb *orthotomeō* cannot be found anywhere else in any kind of Greek literature except two verses in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (italicized in the following excerpts):

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will *make* your paths *straight*. (Prov. 3:6)

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The righteousness of the blameless will *smooth* his way, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness. (Prov. 11:5)

Either the Jewish scholars translating these Hebrew proverbs into Greek decided to coin a term, or the Greek term was used orally within the Jewish community. In both proverbs, the verb takes as the direct object *hodos*, “road” or “way,” thus drawing upon the imagery of clearing debris and then leveling out hills and valleys. In this sense, a construction crew can be said to “cut a straight path” from one place to another. Metaphorically, the expression carries the idea of transforming a desire into a practical possibility. So, Proverbs 11:5 declares that righteous behavior clears a road through life, allowing the righteous one to get where he wants to go.

Paul could have chosen any number of words or expressions when exhorting Timothy with respect to “the word of truth,” but he chose a verb unique to two proverbs urging obedience as a means of journeying through life. Therefore, given the context of Paul’s argument in this segment (2 Tim. 2:14–19), it would appear a better way of understanding *orthotomeō* in 2:15 would be, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *cutting a straight path with the word of truth*” (my edits italicized). Factoring in the metaphor, I would render the verse: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *practically living out the word of truth.*”

Adapted from *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary by Charles R. Swindoll, copyright © 2014 by Charles R. Swindoll Inc.

Name one word-study technique that you can adapt from what you’ve read:

Word studies are an essential part of the process of interpretation—which is simply defined as coming to an understanding of what the Bible *means*. Here’s what Chuck writes about the science and art of interpretation in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Finding the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*:

As you dig in and discover biblical truths on your own, you will realize that interpretation is both a science and an art. It’s a science because it’s guided by rules that form a system. When



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you know and follow those rules, you'll begin to interpret Scripture accurately. You'll guard against error, and you'll gain discernment. You'll be able to spot false messages, whether written or spoken. You'll become more stable in your faith; you'll be able to stand on your own as you master the science of interpretation. But interpretation is also an art, in that it requires Spirit-directed skill to follow these rules as you interpret the Bible.²

Words matter. Paul's words were inspired—God-breathed—and written in a specific time and place in a specific language. Koine Greek was the lingua franca of Paul's era. Interestingly, though, Paul was cosmopolitan in that he knew several languages (Acts 21:37–40) and Jewish scholarship informed his Greek-written letters.

In the original Greek, the command, “Remind them of these things” (2 Timothy 2:14 NASB), doesn't include the direct object “them.” Literally, it reads: “Remind of these things.” The pronoun is implied and refers to the Ephesian church. But what was Timothy to remind them of? From the context, we can conclude that the church was to remember the true theology of Jesus' resurrection and messiahship (2:8) as well as the divine promises found in verses 11–13.

Timothy's public ministry required more than just reminding the Ephesian church of their theology, though; he was also to “solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words” (2:14 NASB). In other words, Timothy was to call upon God as a witness to the fact that Timothy's teaching, in contrast to that of the charlatans, was the same as God's teaching. And since God doesn't engage in *logomacheo* (1 Timothy 6:4)—literally, “battles about words” or “word-fights”—neither must His church. The point: cease quarreling about trivial matters or God will hold word-warriors accountable.

“Word-wars” were a concern for Paul. He addressed it in 1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:14; 2:23; and Titus 3:9. Why do you think Paul was so concerned about it?



DIY WORD STUDY

Now it's your turn to conduct your own word study. You'll need a concordance, several commentaries, and a source that conducts an independent translation of the word or passage. (You can find this in your library or



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online. Also, an abundance of textual notes can be found in the Lumina Bible at lumina.bible.org.) While it is a significant advantage to know the biblical languages before conducting a word study, we have incredibly rich and accurate resources at our disposal in the English language. Don't be intimidated: you can do this!

Which word from 2 Timothy 2:14–19 will you examine for a word study? Why did you choose it? (If you need some suggestions, try *diamarturomai*, meaning “command” from 2:14.)

How many times does your word appear in your New Testament? (You can use a concordance for this, and an interlinear Bible is extra-helpful for obtaining the Greek lexical—or dictionary—form of the word. You can find a great interlinear and interactive text at blueletterbible.com.)

How is the word translated in other Bible versions?

Does the apostle Paul use this word more than once in this epistle?



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Does the apostle Paul use this word in his other epistles?

How does the word function in the text? Is it a noun, verb, adverb, etc.?

Does the word appear in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament, also referred to as the LXX)?

Are there any instances of the word appearing in extra-biblical Greek texts?

Based on the context of your word's biblical and extra-biblical appearances, does the word tend to have the same meaning or a range of meaning depending on the text?

What do commentaries say about the meaning of the word, if they mention it?



How do commentaries explain the larger passage in which the word is a part?

Based on your research, define your word as it appears in 2 Timothy 2. How has the word study enhanced your reading of the text?



A FINAL PRAYER

Holy Spirit, guide me away from idle chatter and toward the excellence of the firm foundation of the Word. Create in me an all-consuming desire to know, love, and serve the Lord. Use me to winsomely turn others from the cancerous evil of false teaching and toward the gospel and abundant life found only in Jesus Christ. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 11 (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2014), 203.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Finding the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2016), 110.



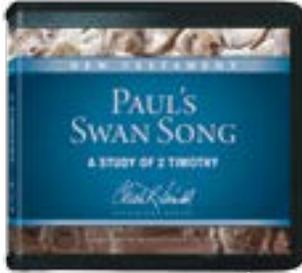
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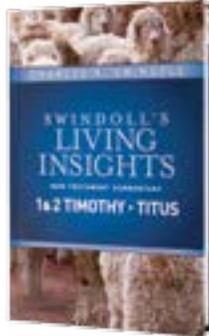
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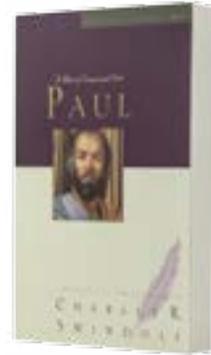
Tools for Digging Deeper



Paul's Swan Song:
A Study of 2 Timothy
by Charles R. Swindoll and
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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