

2 Timothy 2:15 and the ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God who twist the gospel

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In Nigeria, it is a theological issue when ministers of God do not give diligence and utmost care to the study, interpretation and application of the word of truth. Some ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God twist the gospel for a gamut of reasons by not being apt in studying, interpreting and applying the word of God, which have negative implications to the mission mandate of the Church in Nigeria. Consequently, this study exegetically examines the theological implications of some Nigerian ministers of God twisting the gospel for an array of reasons and the need for them to be very apt and meticulous in studying, interpreting and applying the word of truth in the light of 2 Timothy 2:15. Employing redaction method of doing biblical exegesis, this study argues that the experiential issue of some ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God who fail in being apt in studying, interpreting, applying and practising the word of truth is hindering the gospel from being fully known in Nigeria.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study addressed the theological issue of some ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God who are not diligently committed to the ministry of the word of truth. The study recommends that Nigerian ministers of God should study the ministry of the word of truth with diligence and utmost care as Paul instructed Timothy. Disciplines implicated include New Testament and Theological Studies.

Keywords: 2 Timothy 2:15; ministers of God; word of God/truth; false teachers; heresy; mission mandate; Christianity; Nigeria.

Introduction

The tasks of studying, interpreting and applying the word of God, which is the word of truth, are very crucial to the mission mandate of the Church in every age. The Church is called to the mission of proclaiming the word of God; hence, evangelism is the supreme task of the Church (Ituma 2000:1). In addition to the Church engaging in the mission mandate by preaching and living by the word, the Church also needs to be nourished daily by the word of God. Consequently, the Church is in a constant need for the word of God to be properly interpreted and made known in all ages (2 Tm 4:17).

In Nigerian Christendom, it is a theological issue when the word of God is not being properly studied, understood, interpreted and applied daily by some trained and ordained and some untaught self-styled ministers of God and lay believers. Many untrained acclaimed ministers of God wrongly understanding, interpreting and applying, and not aptly making known the gospel (2 Tm 4:17), are consolidating heretical threats to the essence of the mission-mandate of the Church in Nigeria. Experientially, the mandate of preaching the word of God is a serious duty (Kizhakkeyill 2011:257). It is a commissioned task for all Christians, for one of the reasons why a believer remains in the world after conversion is to evangelise (Ituma 2000:1). However, the marked-out minister of God, who is by vocation ordained to be skillfully studying the word of God with the main purpose of understanding, expounding and exemplifying the word to his audience, has the main task of effectively studying the scripture beyond the way a lay Christian would (2 Tm 2:15; 3:17; 4:2). In-depth studying, interpretation, application and practicability of the word of God are some of the major duties of the ministers of God (2 Tm 2:15; 4:2).

Studying, understanding, interpreting and applying the word of God are not easy tasks. Defective understanding, interpreting and application of the word of God leads to the formulation of diverse dogmas on important matters of the Christian faith (kizhakkeyill 2011:257) by the ministers of God who are trained and ordained to preach and adhere to the foundational doctrines, which Jesus and his early disciples taught and modeled (Gl 1:9). Thus, the flawed understanding,

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interpretation and application of the word of God have resulted in the sudden increase of heretic teachings and heterodoxy present in Nigerian Christendom. Some ordained and self-styled acclaimed Nigerian ministers of God are like Hymenaeus and Philetus who are teaching errors (2 Tm 2:16–19) to their audiences. Their toxic erroneous teachings are corrupting and destroying lives (Nwadiolor & Umeanolue 2013:29). Consequently, there are many celebrated heretic ministers of God who are misleading many acclaimed Christians in Nigeria who are untaught and not knowledgeable about the word of God. Therefore, Nigeria is one of the countries in the African continent that is being plagued by spiritual poverty, spiritual malnutrition and spiritual famine (Van Horn 2019:1).

In 2 Timothy 2:15, in relation to how the word of truth is to be handled, Paul gave Timothy exhortations and directions, which are ever relevant to other ministers and Christians in every age. Paul being experienced in the ministry wrote to Timothy, a young pastor, to encourage and instruct him on how he is to effectively go about his ministerial work. The instruction Paul gave to Timothy stresses that a faithful minister should study diligently the word of the truth that he is to be preaching and be practising daily, so that he would have an approved standing before God as a workman of the word, who would not become heretic and bring shame to the gospel. Through the application of the exegetical findings from the exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:15 to Nigerian Christendom, this study examines the need for how the ministers of God are to be very diligent and apt in studying and applying the word of truth in its right portions to the unbelievers' need for sound gospel and growing believers' need for spiritual nourishment. To achieve this aim, this study employing redaction method of doing biblical exegesis unveils the *Sitz-im-Leben* of 2 Timothy 2:15 and the theological motif (Ituma 2013:22) that motivated Paul to instruct Timothy on how he should handle the word of truth and applies the findings to the similar need of the Nigerian ministers of God to be diligent and apt in studying, interpreting and applying the word of truth.

The *Sitz-Im-Leben* of 2 Timothy 2:15

2 Timothy, which appears to be the 'most personal in tone of the three pastoral letters' (Horrell 2006:129), is the second pastoral letter that Paul wrote to Timothy probably around AD 61 to 62 (Dickson 2011:1615). 2 Timothy contains what is probably Paul's last written communication, last will and testament, a letter to a friend and confidant before his death (Wallace 2004:1). This letter contains 27 explicit commands given by Paul to Timothy on what to focus on in his ministerial work. Eighteen of these instructions focus on the ministry of the word by the minister of God (Wallace 2004:1). Similar to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy shows 'a concern to preserve sound teaching (2.1–2, 11–26; 3.14–4.5) and harsh polemic against false teaching and its proponents (3.1–9; 4.3–4)' (Horrell 2006:128). Paul wrote 2 Timothy while he was in chains as a criminal suffering for the gospel (2 Tm 2:9) (Lanz 2016:179). Although he was innocent and not guilty, he was accused of being a rebel against the Roman state. Within the time of the

composition of this captivity epistle, Paul has concluded that his end is very imminent (2 Tm 4:6–7).

Timothy joined Paul in his second missionary journey (Ac 16:2). He continued with Paul as his companion in his missionary work (Phlp 2:19–24). Paul took Timothy and Titus back to Asia Minor; afterwards, they left Titus in Crete. Paul and Timothy continued their journey through the way of Ephesus to Macedonia. They discovered that the church at Ephesus has almost been taken over by false teachers. Paul had already predicted that it would happen (Ac 20:29–30). Paul, while going to Macedonia, left Timothy to oversee the church at Ephesus. Paul therefore instructed him to deal with the heretics, that had become leaders in the church (1 Tm 1:3–4). Paul spent some time in Corinth (2 Tm 4:20). Afterwards he attempted to return to Ephesus by way of Troas, but was re-arrested at the command of Alexander the coppersmith (4:13–14). Later, he was brought to trial in Rome where he had a preliminary hearing (4:16–18); he then came to know that his end was near (4:6–7). Paul suffered in chains, in a cold dungeon (1:16; 2:9; 4:13). Consequently, before his death, Paul wrote to Timothy and encouraged him to persevere in his ministry of the word of truth (Wallace 2004:1).

The background of this text reveals that in Ephesus, there were false teachers who were teaching the heresy that the resurrection of believers had already come. Some were practising legalistic asceticism (1 Tm 4:3) and there were some Gnostics within the Ephesian Christian community (Dickson 2011:1615). Paul warned Timothy about those who would try to subvert and deny the truth that is central to the whole plan of salvation. Hence, Paul's instruction to Timothy 'is set against the backdrop of false teachers' (Wallace 2004:1).

Considering this historical background, Paul's letters to Timothy lay strong emphasis on teaching (Horrell 2006:111) and preserving the true doctrine of the Church. This reveals why the theme of 2 Timothy is Paul's charge to Timothy to 'Preach the word' (4:2); hence, arising from this charge, 'in the midst of false teachings, and a world of erroneous religions and philosophies of men, Paul's final exhortation to Timothy centered around his stand for the truth' (Dickson 2011:1615). In 2 Timothy, Paul emphasised much on endurance and faithfulness to the truth of the word of God; hence, he instructed Timothy to be diligent in studying and applying the word of truth aptly. As a minister, Timothy was persuaded to preserve the truth faithfully in his proclamation of the gospel. 2 Timothy 2:15 was written based on this historical background and it is an important and ever relevant text for the ministers of the gospel in every age.

The exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:15

Paul, in instructing Timothy who has also taken up the vocation of the ministry of the word of God, begins with **σπουδασον** – a Greek verb used in its imperative aorist active second person singular form. **Σπουδασον** is variously translated to mean "be diligent," "be eager," "make every effort" (Wallace 1997:1). The term usually implies both

sustained effort and deep-rooted, serious, ethical motivation. **Σπουδάσον** could also mean “make this your highest priority,” or “pour yourself into this task” (Wallace 1997:1). Its infinitive form is **σπουδάζω**, meaning ‘to make haste’, hence ‘to give diligence’ or ‘to make every effort’. **Σπουδάσον** has two renderings in the Bible. Firstly, many Bible translators translate **σπουδάσον** to mean ‘giving diligence to work’, whereas a few translators translate it to mean ‘study’. Wommack (2021) posits that:

The word ‘study’ in this passage does not mean to pursue knowledge by reading. Rather, it is the Greek verb ‘σπουδάζω’, which means ‘make haste to exert oneself ... It involves much more than just taking in knowledge. (p. 1)

To those who hold this view, **σπουδάσον** does not relate to studentship, but it relates more to a workman. This is the reason the word ‘workman’ is used later in this same verse. It is therefore very appropriate for Paul to use the word ‘workman’ instead of ‘a student’ (Wommack 2021:1). Based on this background, this context underlines **σπουδάσον** to connote ‘give diligence’, ‘endeavor’, or ‘exert oneself’.

However, **σπουδάσον** relates to the word ‘study’ used at the beginning of this verse as rendered by a few translators. The second view relates ‘σπουδάζω’ in 2 Timothy 2:15 to having everything to do with ‘study’. Literally, it cannot be said that ‘σπουδάζω’ in 2 Timothy 2:15 is not speaking about studying the written word of truth. In this verse, the word ‘study’ could be said to be an implied meaning of **σπουδάσον**. **Σπουδάσον** meaning ‘studying’ was implied because it means more than reading. ‘Study’ in this verse implies effort, toil or work. The verses coming before and after 2 Timothy 2:14–18 pinpoint the context of an instruction that Paul gives to a young minister to diligently give himself to the study of ‘the word of truth’ he has been called to preach in words and deeds. Hence, Paul could have implied ‘study’ in his instruction to Timothy.

In this verse, **Δόκιμον** was used in its adjectival normal accusative masculine singular form from **δοκιμος**. **Δόκιμον** functions as the direct object of the sentence. **Δόκιμον** as used here means that Timothy is to engage in ministerial work that God would approve. Timothy should be eager to present himself as an approved servant of God for he should not seek to be approved by men.

Παραστησαι is a Greek verb used in its aorist-infinitive active form from **παριστημι**. **Παραστησαι** in this verse means allowing oneself to be at someone’s disposal, ‘being present’ or to demonstrate something worthy of approval or disapproval. Timothy is the person being instructed to ‘present himself approved unto God’. This implies that there existed others who were ministers of God but whose ministerial works do not seem to Paul as works worthy of being approved by God. Men like Hymenaeus and Philetus were ministers whose ministerial works to Paul would not be approved by God, for they had gone astray from the truth (2 Tm 2:17–18) (Cole 2006:1). Hence, those heretical tendencies prompted Paul to instruct Timothy not to be like the heretics.

Therefore, Paul instructed Timothy to be apt, hence acquainted with Scripture by studying it and not merely reading it. Aptly studying the word would predispose him not to be teaching heresies as doctrine and not be wrongly interpreting the word of truth to those who have no or limited knowledge of the word of God.

In this verse, ‘**Θεῷ**’ is used in its noun dative masculine singular form from **θεός**. **Τῷ Θεῷ** as used here functions as the indirect object of the sentence. This is a term that is generally used in the ancient world of supernatural beings that have powers to bestow benefits that lie beyond the ability of human beings. When used in capital form, it refers to the God of Israel, as opposed to other pantheon. In this text, it is God who approves or disapproves of anyone’s work. God is the one who calls ministers to be human agents in his mission of restoring humanity to himself (Ituma 2000:2). God is the judge of everyone’s works. God knows the worth of the work of any acclaimed minister, because he knows the intent of the human hearts. Based on this background, Paul admonishes Timothy to work hard in ensuring that God approves his work.

Εργατην is a Greek noun used by Paul to describe Timothy as being a workman or a labourer in the vineyard of God. **Εργατην** was used 15 times in the New Testament to mean engaging in an activity involving considerable expenditure of effort. **Εργατην** is the root of English words like ‘ergs’, and ‘ergonomics’; literally, it describes a worker who engages in labour. **Ergates** in the ancient world was used especially of one who works the soil (Austin 2019:1). Studying the word of God requires serious hard work. Studying the scripture involves laborious work to read, study, memorise, analyse, interpret, apply and discuss. The proper in-depth study of the scripture yields the great reward of predisposing the minister not to misuse the Bible (Braun 2007:1). It takes labour to study, rightly understand and apply the word of truth to the right people and right situations. Paul using **Εργατην**, in an imperative mood admonished Timothy who was already working in the ministry of restoring humanity to God. The instruction emphasises the kind of a workman that Timothy should become while working in the ministry. Timothy should be a workman in the ministry who properly handles ‘the word of truth’ and must be faithful in his conduct (Wallace 2004:1). Timothy should be the worker-man who is diligent in his study of the word of truth, whose life remains a godly witness to the gospel, who seeks God’s approval and who preserves the truth of God’s word (Braun 2007:1).

The word **anepaischuntos** describes the absence of agonising feeling caused by a guilty conscience. **Ανεπαισχυντον** as used in 2 Timothy 2:15 means ‘having no cause to be ashamed’. The diligent workman who handles the word rightly is irreprehensible (Austin 2019:1). But, if a workman will not diligently learn and do his works, the result of his works will earn him shame. Consequently, Timothy is instructed to be diligent with his ministry of the word of truth who would not have any cause to earn reproach to God, his ministerial work

and to himself. This is because it is the diligent workman that would have no cause for shame and that would not be liable to be put to shame when his work is inspected (Austin 2019:1). When a servant of God would not give himself diligently to the requirements of the work of the ministry, every cause will abound that would make him to be ashamed of the results of his works. He would not be disgraced only if he gives himself diligently to the work of the ministry.

‘Ορθοτομουντα τον λογον της αληθειας’ which means ‘rightly handling the word of truth’ is the phrase with which Paul concludes his description of the diligent pastor. In this verse, **ορθοτομουντα** is used in its adjectival participle form. It is a rare word that was used only once in the New Testament. Hence, it was described as ‘a New Testament **hapaxlegomenon**’ (Wallace 1997:1). **Ορθοτομουντα** had its origin from two Greek words: *orthos* and *temno*. Depending on the context, *orthos* could have these meanings: ‘right’, ‘standing upright’, and ‘continuing in a straight direction’. Figuratively, *orthos* could mean ‘right’, ‘true’, and ‘of ethically correct behavior’ (Austin 2019:1). Etymologically, it means “‘cutting true,” or “cutting straight”” (Wallace 1997:1). In this verse, *orthos* means handling accurately or interpreting rightly something. *Temno* is a Greek word that means ‘to cut’ or ‘divide’. The combination of *orthos* and *temno* means to make a straight cut, or cut straight by a craftsman (Austin 2019:1). There has been a long debate over the meaning of the participle, **‘Ορθοτομουντα’**. Some scholars have related **Ορθοτομουντα** to mean the following: a craftsman cutting a straight line, a farmer ploughing a straight furrow, a mason setting a straight line of bricks, workmen building a straight road, and a father sharing breads with his children (Wallace 1997:1). It is underlined here that 2 Timothy 2:15 speaks of ‘allot to each their portion, as someone distributing food at a table’ (Guzik 2018:16).

Although **Ορθοτομουντα** could connote many meanings, it literally means ‘to rightly cut’. In this verse, **Ορθοτομουντα** simply means to rightly interpret the word of God which is the word of truth. **Ορθοτομουντα’s** usage in its present active form connotes the urgent and immediate call for Timothy to continually engage in rightly dividing the word of truth regardless of what men would think. Metaphorically, the Greek verb **Ορθοτομουντα** used here is an instruction given to a minister to be carefully performing his ministry tasks. The minister should not regard studying the Bible as a weary work (Scofield 2014:n.p). To Timothy, Paul is saying, “‘handle the word properly,” “take care in handling the word”” (Wallace 1997:1), and not turn heretic. The word of God is not properly divided when heresies are preached. A minister of God must seek the Spirit’s illumination to cut the word of God straight. The Holy Spirit of the Lord’s illuminating power and unction leads ministers to understand the deeper meaning of the word of God (2 Tm 2:7) (Ngele 2007:36).

Some trained, ordained and self-styled ministers of God who are falsely interpreting the word of God may not be deliberately falsely interpreting the word of God; it could

be that they are not giving themselves diligently into studying the word of God or that they are doing so for their selfish benefits. Acclaimed ministers of God who twist the scriptures for their temporal benefits are false teachers (Austin 2019:1). However, faithful ministers of God are to be unashamed before the face of God, specifically on how they handle the gospel (Guzik 2018:1). Paul as a tentmaker may have used ‘cutting rightly’ because tents were made from animals’ skins in a patchwork sort of design. Every piece would have to be cut and fit together properly. Paul was simply saying to Timothy, ‘if one doesn’t interpret correctly the different parts, the whole message won’t come through correctly’ (MacArthur 2019:1). The contexts before and after this passage show that there is a tendency to deviate from the intended route if one is not cautious and does not work hard to acquaint oneself with the right understanding of the word of God, considering its contexts. *Orthotomounta* in 2 Timothy 2:15 means ‘to guide the word of truth along a straight path’, ‘to teach aright’, ‘expound it soundly’, ‘shape rightly’ and ‘preach fearlessly’ (Brown 1986:456). The minister of God should know when to read and understand the scriptures literally and non-literally. Timothy as a minister of God should be meticulous in interpreting and expounding the word of truth.

Λογον is a Greek word, derived from **λόγω** which means ‘to speak with words’. It connotes the meaning of something said and describes a communication. Most often, *logos* is translated in English to mean ‘word’, but the Greek understanding of **λόγος** is somewhat more complex depending on the context. The meanings of **λόγος** include reasons, saying, instruction, message, news, preaching, question, statement and teaching (Austin 2019:1). In this verse, what Timothy was to be diligently studying is the gospel inherent in the ‘apostolic doctrine and example’ (Guzik 2018:1), which Timothy has heard from Paul (2 Tm 2:2). This gospel was described by Paul as ‘a faithful saying’ (2 Tm 2:11). In addition, what Timothy is to study include the Old testament scripture which Jesus and the apostles laboured to interpret in the light of Jesus’ nature and redemptive function (Eph 1:10; 2 Tm 2:8). The New Testament reality captures what the Old Testament adumbrated about salvation history (Wommack 2021:1). The apostles’ doctrine is the gospel about Jesus’ ontological and functional nature. The ‘gospel message’ is what the diligent and faithful workman is to handle and not the minister’s own ideas or theories (Guzik 2018:1). The gospel which Paul taught Timothy, he has to continue studying, teaching and exemplifying (2 Tm 2:2), is not about more money, more love, more status, or more stuff. Rather, the gospel which is the good news is about a real relationship with God through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross which should lead to salvation (2 Tm 2:8–11) (Guzik 2018:1). The gospel message is the word of truth (Wallace 1997:1) and not the profane and vain babblings which cause ungodliness to increase (2 Tm 2:16). Therefore, Timothy has to study **‘λογον της αληθειας’** diligently so that he could have the right understanding (2 Tm 2:7) and not err in properly interpreting and applying its dictates to right people and situations. Timothy is to be

diligent in studying, interpreting, applying the word of God and departing from iniquity because the foundation of the Lord stands firm and because it is only the Lord who knows those who are his (2 Tm 2:18).

Conclusions on the exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:15

2 Timothy 2:15 is an instruction that Paul gave to Timothy who was a young minister of the gospel. Timothy was admonished to keep focused in his ministry, by paying attention to his own life and his ministry of the word of God. Paul encouraged Timothy to be hard working and be apt to endure for the service of the Lord. Timothy's goal would be to present himself approved to God and not to human beings. Timothy is, by this instruction, called to be faithful to God. As a minister, specially called of God, Timothy is not to manifest any form of unskillfulness in accurately handling the word of truth. He is not to bring disgrace to the gospel and to the name of the Lord.

Paul states that a minister should be well-informed with the requirements of his vocation. The hard work required of Timothy as a minister includes rightly interpreting, applying the dictates of the word to his life and apportioning the word of truth to the people, he has been called to pastor. As a minister of God, he should know the correct meaning of the word of God and as well know what the word does not mean. If he fails to be skilled in the art of interpreting the word, he would mislead many from the truth and have cause to be ashamed.

What the diligent and faithful workman should handle is the word of truth. Paul here speaks of the gospel message as truth because 2 Timothy 2:15 in its context is used to address the issue of false teachers and heretical teaching and the need for the minister to be diligent in his ministerial vocation. False teachers are those who twist the word of truth for diverse motivations. This instruction first applies to Timothy and by extension to every other minister of God in every generation. Ministers of God are charged by this instruction addressed to Timothy to be diligent in handling God's word, by meticulously searching for and preaching the truth that characterises the word of God and living by its dictates.

Ministers of God and the Ministry of the Word of truth in the contemporary Nigerian society

Nigeria is the most populous African country characterised by a high rate of religiosity and spirituality (Diamant 2019:1). Christianity is one of the thriving religions in Nigeria. In this modern era in Nigeria, Christianity has been consistent in manifesting high rate of proliferations of churches that are 'popping up like popcorn pops in a popcorn popper' (Van Horn 2006:1), proliferations of church founders and acclaimed Christians. The causes of these proliferations are related to the impact of heresies (Izunwa & Mgbemena

2012:110) and the diverse ways the emerging acclaimed ministers of God go about the ministry of the word of truth for diverse motivations (Ogunbade 2020:63). Some Nigerian ministers of God are false teachers (David 2021:2), for most often, they are not apt in interpreting, applying and teaching the word of truth considering its contexts to appropriate people, and suitable situations. In Nigeria, false teachers are encapsulating heretical teachings about grace (Brown 2014:8), deliverance (Ssemakula 2020:1), universal salvation (PursueGod 2021:1), giving, prosperity (Leake 2020:1) and health (Van Horn 2006:1) in materialistic gospel messages (Minchakpu 1999:1) to defraud and exploit the sick, the poor and biblical illiterate Christians (Nwadiolor & Umeanolue 2013:29). Many Nigerian acclaimed ministers of God lacking passion for the mission-mandate of the Church and compassion for the solution-oriented acclaimed followers of Jesus in Nigeria are subtly peddling materialistic gospels and fake miracles (Oditia 2020:1) with the hidden purpose of manipulating their untaught gullible church members (Van Horn 2006:1) and vulnerable audiences so as to achieve their desired goals. Many acclaimed Nigerian ministers of God were not divinely called to plant churches, to preach or to oversee churches; rather, they called themselves to be plenipotentiaries of God for a gamut of motivations. Hence, it is a trend in Nigerian Christendom that everybody in the church is a potential pastor and prophet. It should be noted that everyone is called to preach the gospel, but not everyone is called to the pulpit (Azuka 2021:1). Many acclaimed Nigerian Christians have been and are being misled by some of these famous ministers of God with errors, heresies (Leake 2020:1) and false hopes (Keswa 2014:1).

In addition, significant numbers of Nigerian acclaimed ministers of God are not well-trained ministers of the word (Van Horn 2006:1), nor do they give diligence to the ministry of the word. They engage in the vocation of the ministry of the word to attract audience and enrich themselves. Some may claim to be trained but they are guilty of propagating false teachings (Van Horn 2006:1) and heresies without even knowing it and thereby misleading their followers. Some are well acquainted with the word, but they manipulate it to rouse their congregations, to stand approved before them and be able to achieve their ulterior goals. They, by being clever, cunning, subtle and eloquent, communicate the word erroneously (Kumuyi 2021:1). They feed their audiences with sugar-coated messages with no substance (Emeka 2006:xiii). There are others whose behaviours bring reproach to the gospel. Some do not balance their acclaimed calling with godly life required of ministers of God. Experientially, some acclaimed ministers of God today are committing sexual sins (Agazue 2016:1). Some are thieves, cultic (Minchakpu 1999:1), arrogant, proud, popularity-conscious, oppressive, power-conscious, and money-conscious, and some are accused of performing fake miracles (Oditia 2020:1). These theological turpitudes have predisposed these acclaimed ministers of God to incur disgrace to the mission-mandate of the Church in Nigeria. Consequently, many applauded ministers of God in Nigeria have cause to be ashamed. This has resulted

in the proliferation of materialistic ministers, prosperity preaching, nominal Christians, syncretic Christians and so on. The increase in the number of those who claim to be ordained ministers of God who are not apt in handling the word of truth and the increase in the number of acclaimed Christians who are being fed with their materialistic gospels have negatively resulted in the increase in religiosity of Nigerian Christians and the increase in moral decadence in Nigeria (Nwadiakor & Umeanolue 2013:39). This is so because many acclaimed ministers of God have failed in being apt in handling the word of God and many Nigerian Christians are not giving themselves to studying the word of God for their personal spiritual growth; hence, many are being misled and not committed to doing God's will.

In Nigeria, the increase in religiosity of many acclaimed ministers and lay Christians who are not giving themselves to the study and putting into practice the word of God are negatively impacting on the mission-mandate of the Church in Nigeria. The ministers of God in Nigeria have the need to shift the paradigm of their ministry of the word from chasing after their selfish interests to being passionate about achieving the desired mission-mandate goals of the Church. Preaching is not a business for the lazy ones (Emeka 2006:xiii) and for those who have ulterior motivations. Ministers of God can be equipped to be apt in handling the word of God effectively. Nigerian ministers of God can be empowered to be standing as witnesses and living proofs of the ministry of the word, and their 'ministry of the word having full entrance into the hearts of the people and exercising full sway over them' (Murray 1984:323). Experientially, there is a need for Nigerian acclaimed ministers of God to be trained, to be diligent, apt in the study and the application of the word of God so that the truth of the word of God will be fully made known in Nigeria that is the giant of Africa which is plagued by 'spiritual poverty, spiritual malnutrition, and spiritual famine' (Van Horn 2006:1).

The theological implication of 2 Timothy 2:15 to the Nigerian ministers of the word of God

Spoudazo, as used in 2 Timothy 2:15, implies that the Nigerian ministers of God should be giving themselves to the ministry of the word in such a way that pleases God so that they can be effectively equipped to feed the teeming population that are being converted to Christian faith and the maturing believers with the right portions of the pure milk and the meat of the Word of God (Van Horn 2006:1). Nigerian ministers of God are advised to refrain from seeking the approval of their audiences and engaging in church business for selfish purposes. Rather, they are to ensure that God approves of them and their acts of service in the ministry. They are commanded to give of themselves diligently to the study of the word of truth with the purposes of having the right understanding of the scripture and with the help of the Holy Spirit rightly interpreting the word to the hearers and applying the word to their lives. 2 Timothy is an authoritative

instruction to Nigerian ministers of God not to be engaging in any form of manipulation of the word of God. They are advised to interpret the word of God in its purest form, reserving no place for any selfish purpose and living godly lives. 2 Timothy 2:15 is therefore a challenge to Nigerian ministers of God to always appropriately interpret and apply the word of God in words and in deeds.

Recommendations

- The Nigerian ministers of God should study the word of God with diligence and utmost care.
- They are to be patiently seeking wisdom, discernment, revelations and illumination from the Holy Spirit for them to be guided to be rightly interpreting, applying and exemplifying the word of God.
- They should not give credence to any form of false doctrine or heresy.
- Ministers of God should always accompany the studying and preaching of the word of God with prayers.
- Ministers of God should ensure high standard of godliness by abstaining from behaviours that would predispose them to be ashamed before God and that would predispose the gospel to be reproached.
- Ministers of God should work hard to ensure that their acts of service must be aimed to please God who would reward them at the final day of Judgment.
- They should seek higher biblical education and/or training to equip themselves to be skilled workmen of the word.

Conclusion

The task of the minister of God to the ministry of the word of God is stressed in 2 Timothy 2:15. The exegesis of 2 Timothy established that the duties of ministers of God include working hard to ensure that themselves and their works please God, so that they would not have any cause to be ashamed. The ministers of God are to be consistent in interpreting and applying the word of truth appropriately. Paul gave this instruction to Timothy, a young minister. This also applies to other faithful ministers of God who want their ministerial services to be approved by God.

In Nigeria, it is a theological concern that many acclaimed ministers of God are not rightly handling the ministry of the word of God. Many ministers of God have given themselves to entertaining their congregations, shifting from telling them the truth of the gospel for selfish reasons. They deviate from giving the right interpretation of the word of God in the right form and portion to their hearers. This is negatively impacting the mission-mandate of the Church in Nigeria. The theological implications of 2 Timothy 2:15 cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the instructions of 2 Timothy form a guideline and a challenge to ministers of God in Nigeria to ensure that they work hard to fulfill the requirements of the tasks of the vocation of the ministry of the word. This is required because it is when ministers of God balance their ministerial engagement with the task of

working hard by faith, not bringing shame, interpreting correctly the word of God through the help of the Holy Spirit that they could do the work of the ministry that pleases God.

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C.P.U. is the sole author of this research article.

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