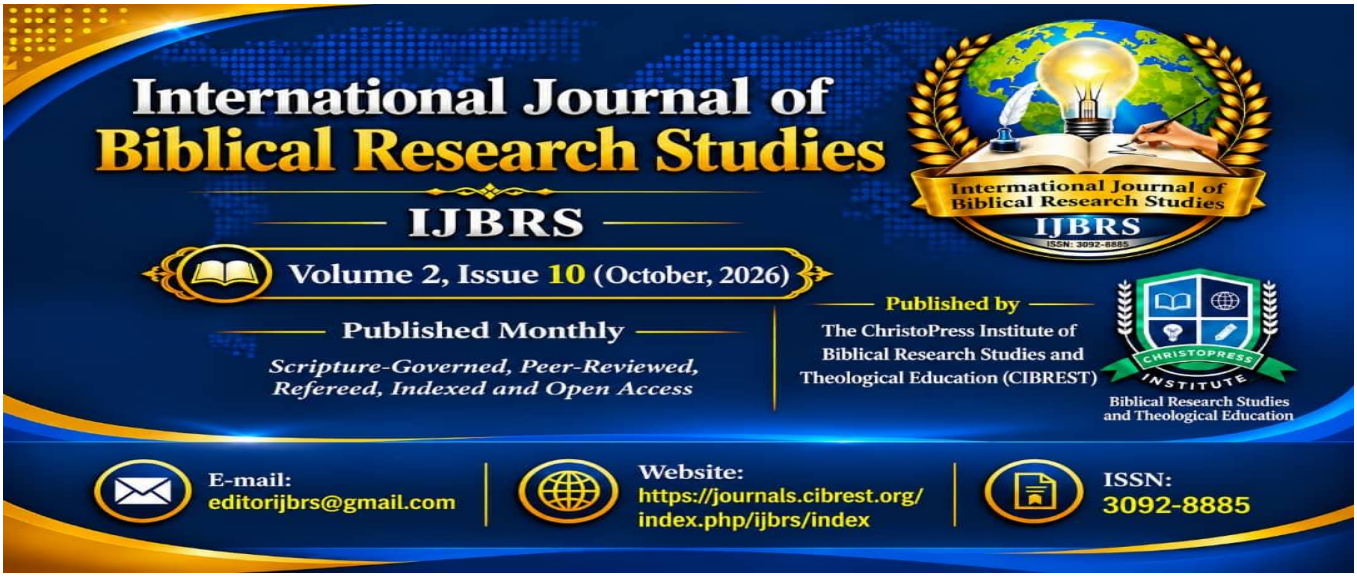
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The Approved Workman: 2 Timothy 2:15 and the Formation of Ministerial Competence in Africa

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Abstract

Ministerial formation in Africa goes beyond just passing on theological knowledge. It is about shaping ministers whose character, skills, accountability, and approach to Scripture are all aligned under God's authority. This article takes a closer look at 2 Timothy 2:15, focusing on how the minister is described as a workman who should be "approved unto God." The study uses a Scripture-Governed research approach, diving into historical-grammatical exegesis, lexical analysis, contextual analysis, theological analysis, and a review of related literature. It makes the case that the competence of a minister, as outlined in 2 Timothy 2:15, is not just about academic success or technical abilities; it is a calling from God that involves diligence, proven character, skilled workmanship, a lack of shame, and a faithful handling of the truth. Building on the Scripture-Governed Ministerial Diligence Framework from the previous study, this article expands on the idea of the "approved workman" as a valuable model for ministerial training in Africa. The findings suggest that approval isn't merely a certificate or a public image; it is a theological mindset where ministerial competence is constantly assessed in God's eyes. The article recommends that African ministerial education should weave together biblical exegesis, spiritual growth, practical ministry, ethical accountability, supervised practice, and a commitment to lifelong learning. In conclusion, effective ministry is best seen as a disciplined stewardship of both Scripture and one's vocation before God.

Keywords: *Scripture-Governed research approach, Scripture-Governed Ministerial Diligence Framework, 2 Timothy 2:15, approved workman, ministerial competence, ministerial formation in Africa, Scripture-governed ministerial formation, scriptural review.*

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Thesis Statement

This study suggests that 2 Timothy 2:15 presents ministerial competence as a comprehensive vocation that includes diligent preparation, a focus on gaining God's approval, tested character, unashamed craftsmanship, and a responsible way of handling the word of truth. In the context of African ministerial training, the idea of the "approved workman" acts as a Scripture-based model where theological knowledge and practical skills are nurtured together under divine accountability.

Research Gap

While previous research has delved into the lexical and exegetical meanings of 2 Timothy 2:15, along with broader themes related to theological education and ministerial formation, the literature reviewed for this study lacks a cohesive understanding of how the verse's focus on God-directed approval can guide the development of ministerial competence in African contexts. Often, discussions about theological education tend to separate academic knowledge, ministerial skills, personal character, and spiritual growth. This study seeks to bridge that gap by viewing the "approved workman" as a unifying theological concept. The model proposed here aims to be constructive, rather than implying that Paul laid out a specific modern curriculum or institutional framework.

Bible Version Used

The primary English Bible version referenced in this study is the King James Version (KJV). Greek terms are examined as necessary to ensure accurate exegesis.

1.0 Introduction

The on-going task of shaping Christian ministers is a crucial responsibility for the church. Preparing ministers involves more than just sharing biblical knowledge; it is about fostering interpretive skills, building character, gaining hands-on ministry experience, and ensuring accountability within the faith community. If any of these elements are neglected, theological education risks becoming either too detached from real ministry or lacking in solid biblical interpretation. Paul's advice to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 capture these ideas perfectly: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." [1]

[1] 2 Tim 2:14

This verse is often remembered for highlighting the importance of study, but its message goes deeper than just academic learning. Timothy is urged to present himself to God, to seek His approval, to be a diligent worker who is not ashamed, and to accurately handle the word of truth. Therefore, the aim of ministerial training is not just to accumulate knowledge; it is about developing a person whose work can withstand divine scrutiny.[2]

This distinction is especially important for ministerial education in Africa. The contemporary African church includes a wide range of training environments, such as formal seminaries, Bible colleges, universities, denominational training centre, apprenticeship models, local-church schools, and informal ministerial preparation methods. Each of these settings brings its own resources, educational standards, ecclesiastical traditions, and expectations.

Even with all its complexities, one fundamental theological question remains: what kind of person should emerge from ministerial training, and what qualifies them to engage with Scripture and serve the church with integrity? This study seeks to illuminate this issue by examining the idea of the "approved workman." This term is not just a trendy label slapped onto the biblical text; it is a profound theological concept grounded in the relationships highlighted in 2 Timothy 2:15. The article clearly differentiates between the text's direct message and the responsible inferences that can be drawn for ministerial education. The verse ties together diligence, being presented before God, gaining approval, skilled workmanship, freedom from shame, and accurately handling the word of truth. The proposed model for ministry organizes these elements into a unified understanding of competence.[3]

Moreover, this study builds on the author's previous research, which introduced the Scripture-Governed Ministerial Diligence Framework (SGMDF). This framework structured 2 Timothy 2:15 around four interconnected components: diligence, divine approval, skilled workmanship, and the proper handling of Scripture. The current article focuses on the second and third components, diving deep into what it really means to be an "approved workman."[4] In the end, the emphasis is not on whether ministers hold degrees, titles, preaching abilities, or institutional accolades. While those can be significant, they do not automatically guarantee divine approval. The real question is whether theological education and practical skills are being channelled into a disciplined relationship with God, Scripture, truth, and character, while also being accountable to ministry. Viewed this way,

[2] William D. Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 510–12
[3] George W. Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 405–8.
[4] Anthony Lungu, "The Workman at the Well: 2 Timothy 2:15 and Ministerial Training in Africa" (unpublished research manuscript, 2026).

ministerial competence encompasses both intellectual and moral dimensions, merging theological insight with practical application, and intertwining personal growth with the life of the church.

This article takes us on an insightful journey through a review of both secular and Christian literature, focusing on a contextual and lexical analysis of 2 Timothy 2:15. It establishes a theo-theoretical and conceptual framework, develops key themes, presents findings, engages in discussion, explores impacts, offers recommendations, and concludes with a thoughtful summary. The goal here is to lay a biblical-theological foundation for understanding ministerial competence within African Christian education, all while recognizing that no single passage can encompass every detail necessary for contemporary theological education.

1.1 Secular Literature Review

When discussing professional formation, research often emphasizes that competence is about much more than just having information readily available. Professional learning involves a dynamic interplay between knowledge, reflective judgment, practice, identity, and the communities in which practitioners operate. For example, Donald Schön's insights on the reflective practitioner highlight the importance of reflection in professional practice. Likewise, [5]Jack Mezirow's transformation learning theory posits that learning transcends mere information absorption; it requires engaging in critical reflection that encourages learners to reconsider the assumptions that guide their actions.[6]

These perspectives are incredibly relevant for ministerial education, as ministry takes place in real-life human contexts. A minister's role encompasses interpreting texts, teaching individuals, counselling families, leading communities, resolving conflicts, exercising authority, and adapting to changing social circumstances. Therefore, being competent in this field involves much more than just knowing biblical terms or theological concepts; it requires a disciplined ability to thoughtfully and responsibly apply knowledge in practice. We can't simply take secular theories of professional competence and apply them to Christian ministry without a second thought. After all, Christian ministry is far more than just a job. Its authority is deeply rooted in theology, its guiding text is Scripture, its community is the church, and ultimately, it answers to God. So, while professional theories can offer valuable insights into the educational process, they can't fully capture the theological essence of what it means to be competent in ministry.

[5] Donald A. Schön, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
[6] Jack Mezirow, Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

When it comes to interdisciplinary literature, its importance lies more in methodology than in authority. It shows us why ministerial education should blend knowledge with practice, reflection with action, and formation with accountability. In this study, Scripture stands as the cornerstone for defining ministry from a theological perspective.

1.2 Christian Literature Review

Throughout history, Christian scholarship has connected ministerial preparation with theological insight, spiritual growth, character development, and service. Edward Farley's critique of the fragmented "theological encyclopedia" pointed out how theological education can often become disjointed, breaking down into separate academic fields and overlooking the holistic development of those studying theology.[7] This concern is especially pertinent here, as ministerial competence can't simply be reduced to the successful completion of isolated courses.

Craig Dykstra and other scholars focused on theological education have emphasized the significance of formation practices and how theological learning relates to Christian vocation. From this perspective, theological education is not just about what students learn; it is also about who they are becoming and how they engage with the practices of the church.[8] African theological scholarship offers a vital perspective in this discussion. Kwame Bediako emphasized that Christian theology in Africa should truly engage with the African context instead of being just an external import.[9] Likewise, John Mbiti's research highlights the importance of African religious and cultural backgrounds in shaping Christian theological reflection.[10] This body of work stresses the need for contextualization while ensuring it stays rooted in the biblical text and the fundamental tenets of Christianity.

Byang Kato's focus on biblical fidelity within African Christianity adds another important voice to the conversation. His contributions arose in a time when African Christian theology was grappling with the challenges of traditional religious beliefs, theological liberalism, and the search for contextual expression.[11] While this study does not replicate Kato's historical argument, it aligns with

[7] Edward Farley, Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).
[8] Craig Dykstra, Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).
[9] Kwame Bediako, Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

[10] John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990).
[11] Byang H. Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa (Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1975).

his concern that ministerial formation must keep a strong link between biblical authority and the context in which ministry takes place.

Recent conversations in theological education have also highlighted the importance of integrating biblical knowledge, practical formation, community, and vocation. For example, Thomas Oden's pastoral theology connects ministry to the classical Christian tradition and the responsibilities of pastoral care,[12] while Michael Peterson's insights on education emphasize shaping individuals rather than merely passing on information.[13]

The literature thus offers several key insights: ministerial education should focus on forming individuals; theological learning should be connected to practice; African contexts must be taken seriously; and biblical authority should remain at the forefront. However, these insights need a unifying biblical category. This article suggests that the "approved workman" from 2 Timothy 2:15 can serve as such a category when developed thoughtfully and without directly imposing modern educational structures onto Paul's context.

1.3 Research Problem

This study tackles the issue of fragmented ministerial competence. In various approaches to ministerial education, some focus primarily on academic achievements, while others emphasize preaching skills, pastoral experience, spiritual charisma, institutional recognition, or practical success. Each of these aspects can play a role in ministry, but none alone offers a complete biblical perspective on what it means to be a minister accountable to God.

Thus, the problem is both theological and educational. When ministerial formation disconnects knowledge from character, Scripture from practice, or academic training from divine accountability, graduates might end up with credentials but lack the integrated competence necessary for responsible ministry. On the flip side, if practical ministry is prioritized at the expense of rigorous study, ministers may be well-meaning and active yet unprepared to handle Scripture with the faithfulness it deserves.

2 Timothy 2:15 provides a focused corrective, as its sequence brings these dimensions together rather than isolating them. Timothy is urged to exert himself, present himself to God, gain approval, work without shame, and accurately handle the word of truth. The research problem, therefore, is how to

[12] Thomas C. Oden, Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983);
[13] Michael Peterson, Philosophy of Education: Issues and Options (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

understand these elements collectively as a coherent account of ministerial competence, particularly in the context of African theological education.

1.4 Research Aim

The goal of this study is to explore 2 Timothy 2:15 both exegetical and theologically, aiming to develop a Scripture-Governed understanding of ministerial competence centred on the idea of the "approved workman." Additionally, it will consider the implications of this understanding for ministerial formation in Africa.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What insights do 2 Timothy 2:15 offer, considering its literary and canonical context, about how a minister should present himself before God to gain His approval?
2. How do the interconnected concepts of diligence (spoudazō), divine approval (dokimos), unashamed workmanship (ergatēs anepaischyntos), and the proper handling of the word of truth (orthotomeō) come together to form a cohesive understanding of what it means to be a competent minister?

3. What theological and educational principles can we responsibly extract from this passage, and how can the resulting "approved workman" model effectively blend biblical knowledge, character development, practical ministry, accountability, and lifelong learning in the context of ministerial training in Africa?

1.6 Research Methodology

This study adopts a Scripture-Governed research approach, where Scripture serves as the primary theological authority for our arguments.[14] We utilize a variety of methods, including historical-grammatical exegesis, lexical analysis, contextual analysis, theological analysis, conceptual analysis, and a comparative literature review. The historical-grammatical method looks closely at the wording of 2 Timothy 2:15 within the context of the entire chapter and the broader scope of the Pastoral Epistles. Lexical analysis focuses on important Greek terms, recognizing that a dictionary definition alone doesn't capture the full meaning of the verse. Theological analysis connects the passage to themes of Christian ministry, accountability, truth, and formation. The comparative literature review

[14] See Ilesanmi, Dele Alaba. "A Guide to Reviewing Scripture-Governed Research Papers: Why Some Theological and Biblical Research Fail the Test." *International Journal of Biblical Research Studies* 2, no. 6 (2026): 1–40. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21072486.

engages the biblical analysis with existing scholarship on theological education, professional development, and African Christian theology.

This study is qualitative and constructive in nature. It does not include field surveys, interview samples, or statistical data, so the proposed model should not be seen as empirically validated. Instead, its contribution lies in its conceptual and exegetical insights: it creates an interpretive framework based on Scripture and highlights educational implications that could be explored further through empirical research.

The methodological design outlines three distinct levels of argument. First, the article pinpoints what can be reasonably attributed to the text itself. Next, it weaves those textual insights into a theological understanding of the approved workman. Finally, it develops educational applications aimed at African ministerial formation. This clear distinction ensures that constructive recommendations are not mistaken for direct commands from 2 Timothy 2:15.

2.0 Scriptural Review

The immediate literary context of 2 Timothy 2:15 are crucial. Paul is speaking to Timothy, a minister and co-worker, emphasizing the importance of faithfully transmitting the apostolic message. The surrounding verses caution against getting caught up in wordy disputes, empty chatter, false teachings, and the destabilizing effects of error. Thus, the command in verse 15 is set against a backdrop where how Christian teaching is handled can significantly impact the community's well-being.[15] Following verse 15, there's a warning to steer clear of "profane and vain babbling," as such talk only fuels ungodliness. The mention of Hymenaeus and Philetus highlights the destructive nature of their teachings.[16] This context makes it clear that the "word of truth" is not just an abstract concept; it is the apostolic message that Timothy must manage with care amidst various competing claims. Additionally, this verse should be considered alongside 2 Timothy 1:13–14, where Timothy is urged to hold on to sound words and safeguard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit, and 2 Timothy 2:1–2, where he is instructed to pass on what he has learned to trustworthy individuals who can teach others.[17] This means the ministerial role is not just about individual study; it is about stewardship, where the way of truth is handled has a ripple effect on others.

[15] George W. Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 405–8.
[16] 2 Tim 2:16–18
[17] [15] 2 Tim 2:16–18

2.1 Diligence: Spoudazō

The King James Version kicks off 2 Timothy 2:15 with the word "Study," but the original Greek verb is σπουδάζω (spoudazō). This term carries a rich meaning that goes beyond just hitting the books; it encompasses eagerness, making a concerted effort, being diligent, and truly applying oneself.[18] While the KJV's "study" captures a key part of the command in its historical context, the Greek word opens up a wider perspective that includes more than just academic study.

This distinction is crucial when we think about what it means to be a competent minister. Sure, a capable minister needs to dive into Scripture, theology, languages, history, and the context of their ministry. But diligence also means putting in the hard work to prepare for teaching, preaching, counselling, leading, and correcting. It is all about the overall attitude of the worker towards their mission.

Diligence also carries a moral weight. The command is not about "studying so people will be impressed with your knowledge." Instead, it points to the idea of presenting oneself before God. So, the focus of our diligence is ultimately directed toward God. Ministerial learning is not just about showing off what you know; it is about getting ready for responsible service.

This verse pushes back against two extremes. On one hand, ministry cannot just be about spontaneous inspiration without the groundwork of disciplined preparation. On the other hand, preparation should not turn into a mere collection of academic knowledge that is disconnected from the calling. Spoudazō embodies the active drive toward serious and meaningful ministerial work.

2.2 Divine Approval: Dokimos

The second key term here is δόκιμος (dokimos), which translates to "approved." This word is linked to something that has been tested and found to be genuine or acceptable.[19] In 2 Timothy 2:15, the minister is called to present themselves to God as approved. It's important to note the passive theological direction of this verse: the minister is seeking approval from God, rather than trying to earn it primarily through human accolades.

[18] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "σπουδάζω."
[19] Danker et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "δόκιμος"; see also Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, trans. James D. Ernest, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:368–70.

This does not mean that human recognition is unimportant. Christian ministry takes place in communities where character, doctrine, and practice are closely observed and assessed. The New Testament outlines qualifications for overseers and servants that include reputation, character, teaching skills, and how one conducts their household.[20] However, 2 Timothy 2:15 reminds us that the ultimate evaluation comes from God.

The idea of approval also suggests a process of testing. A minister is not simply deemed competent based on good intentions. Their work needs to stand up to scrutiny. Knowledge should be evident in how they interpret and teach; their character must hold strong under pressure; practical decisions should align with Christian truth; and the way they handle Scripture should not bring shame.

Therefore, the term dokimos introduces an essential principle: competence must be accountable and demonstrable. It is not just about what a minister claims to know; it is about what has been shaped, tested, and proven through faithful work before God and within the community.

2.3 Skilled Ministry: Ergatēn Anepaischynton

The noun ἐργάτης (ergatēs) translates to a worker or labourer. In this context, Timothy is portrayed not just as a student but as a worker.[21] This vocational imagery shifts the focus from merely having information to the responsible execution of a task. The minister engages with the word of truth.
The accompanying term ἀνεπαίσχυντον (anepaischynton) refers to someone who is unashamed or has no reason to feel shame.[22] This phrase does not imply perfection or a lack of sin. Instead, in this context, it describes work that can be presented without embarrassment. The worker's ministry should not falter under scrutiny due to careless handling of the message.

The blend of ergatēs and anepaischynton is crucial for effective ministry. A worker needs to have skills, but those skills come hand in hand with accountability. A minister might be eloquent but still misinterpret Scripture; they could have impressive academic qualifications yet lack ethical integrity; or they might boast practical experience while being careless with doctrine. Thus, a biblical worker is someone whose abilities are focused on doing their job faithfully.

We should not over analyse the metaphor to reconstruct an ancient profession in detail. The text gives us a clear picture of a worker who must perform their tasks correctly. So, the term "workman" is

[20] 1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9.
[21] Danker et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "ἐργάτης."
[22] Danker et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "ἀνεπαίσχυντος."

enough to support a theology of diligent craftsmanship without needing to make speculative claims about specific ancient trades.

2.4 Right Handling: Orthotomountα

The participle ὀρθοτομοῦντα (orthotomounta) is often translated as "rightly dividing" in the KJV. The verb orthotomeō is not commonly found in the New Testament, which makes understanding its context all the more important. Essentially, it means to handle or direct something correctly or to make it straight.[23] The present participle illustrates how the workman engages with the word of truth. This expression should not be boiled down to just one modern method of interpreting the Bible. The key takeaway is about responsible and precise handling. A minister must avoid twisting the truth to win debates, push personal agendas, or safeguard institutional interests. The word of truth deserves to be treated in a way that reflects its nature as truth.

Handling scripture properly also comes with an ethical responsibility. When an interpreter's approach leads to a meaning that clashes with the text's context, it's not being handled correctly. Similarly, using the right words in a manipulative way is also a misstep. That's why exegesis, teaching, and conduct need to be intertwined in ministerial training.

2.5 The Interdependence of the Pillars

The four key elements of the verse rely on each other. Diligence without truth can lead to disciplined mistakes. Approval without proven effort can turn into empty claims. Workmanship lacking divine accountability can devolve into mere professional skills without any theological guidance. And right handling without personal discipline can remain just an ideal, never put into action.
We can express their relationship like this:

Diligence → prepares the worker.

Approval → sets the course of accountability.

Workmanship → showcases competence in action.

Right handling → clarifies the core task with the word of truth.

These are not four separate qualifications; they are four aspects of a unified vocational journey. The worker prepares diligently to present themselves to God, seeks approval through tested faithfulness,

[23] Danker et al., Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "ὀρθοτομέω"; Knight, Pastoral Epistles, 412–13.

carries out ministry without shame, and showcases that workmanship through the proper handling of the word.

As a result, the idea of competence becomes holistic. While academic knowledge is important, it is not enough on its own. Practical experience is vital, but it also falls short by itself. Spiritual sincerity is essential, yet it cannot stand alone. Institutional recognition might be helpful, but it cannot replace divine accountability. The biblical model brings all these dimensions together under the authority of Scripture.

3.0 Theo-Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theo-theoretical framework guiding this study is centred on Scripture-Governed Ministerial Formation. At its core, it asserts that ministerial competence should be defined and assessed in light of the biblical calling of the worker before God. This framework is anchored by three key theological principles: Godward accountability, Christ-centred ministry, and Spirit-enabled formation.

To begin with, the minister holds a profound accountability to God. The phrase "approved unto God" sets the tone for evaluation. A minister's identity goes far beyond the approval of students, congregations, denominations, academic institutions, or social media followers. While these groups can offer valid assessments of ministry, the biblical perspective reaches far beyond their confines.

Next, ministerial competence is fundamentally Christ-centred. The chapter at hand emphasizes a strong Christological focus. Paul urges Timothy to keep Jesus Christ—rose from the dead and descended from David—at the forefront of his mind, as outlined in Paul's gospel.[24] Thus, ministry is not just an independent profession; it's a service rooted in the gospel of Christ.

Lastly, formation is Spirit-enabled. Earlier in the letter, Timothy is reminded of the gift from God and is encouraged to act with the power, love, and sound judgment that come from God's Spirit.[25] Therefore, a disciplined worker is neither just a self-made scholar nor merely a spontaneous spiritual individual. Instead, ministerial formation is about combining dedicated human effort with divine grace.

[24] 2 Tim 2:8.
[25] 2 Tim 1:6–7.

From these theological foundations, the conceptual framework unfolds into four dimensions: (1) disciplined preparation, (2) Godward approval, (3) competent workmanship, and (4) responsible handling of Scripture. These dimensions align with the key themes of 2 Timothy 2:15 while allowing for a broader educational application to develop around them.

The framework organizes these four dimensions into five key areas of formation: biblical and theological knowledge, interpretive skills, personal and spiritual growth, practical ministry, and accountability within the institution or church. It is important to note that these five areas are meant to be constructive educational categories and shouldn't be mistaken as a direct list from Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15.

Additionally, the framework unfolds across three stages: formation, supervised ministry or ordination, and lifelong ministry. These stages represent an educational synthesis rather than a strict Pauline institutional model. Their aim is to highlight that becoming an approved workman is not just about graduating; it is about on-going development throughout a lifetime of accountability of ministry.

3.1 The Approved Workman Model

The proposed model can be visualized as a three-tiered structure.

a) Level One: Theological Orientation: God → Christ → Scripture → Spirit-enabled ministry.
b) Level Two: Ministerial Competent: Diligence → Approval → Workmanship → Right Handling.
c) Level Three: Educational Embodiment: Knowledge → Interpretation → Character → Practice → Accountability.

This model is designed with a clear direction in mind. The theological orientation serves as the central guiding principle; the four dimensions outline the ministerial calling; and the five educational areas offer spaces where competence can be nurtured and evaluated.

Consequently, the model moves away from a purely credential-based view of competence. While a qualification may indicate that someone has finished a program, it does not automatically signify the biblical quality of being "approved unto God." Similarly, the model also steers clear of a solely charismatic interpretation of competence. While spiritual gifts can enhance ministry, they do not replace the necessity for diligence, testing, skill, and the responsible handling of Scripture.

The approved workman is essentially a well-trained practitioner of Scripture: someone who diligently studies, seeks God's evaluation of their calling, hones the skills needed for faithful service, and responsibly handles the word of truth.

4.0 Ministrial Competence

The main theme that emerges from this study is that ministerial competence is a form of accountable-craftsmanship. A minister is not just a conveyor of information; they are a steward whose work deserves careful examination. This theme unfolds through five interconnected movements.

First, competence starts with orientation. The worker must understand who they are ultimately serving. The Godward phrase "unto God" helps keep ministerial education from turning into a race for academic accolades or public acclaim.

Second, competence demands formation. The term spoudazō signifies on-going effort. A minister does not achieve competence through just one course, an ordination ceremony, or a fleeting moment of inspiration. Instead, competence is built through consistent learning and practice.

Third, competence involves testing. The word dokimos brings in the idea of approval that comes after examination. Therefore, ministerial programs should incorporate suitable forms of assessment, supervised practice, constructive feedback, doctrinal evaluation, and character development.

Fourth, competence must translate into workmanship. The minister is an ergatēs, a worker. Knowledge needs to transform into faithful action. A theology that doesn't influence preaching, teaching, pastoral care, leadership, and ethical decision-making is incomplete in terms of ministerial formation.

Fifth, competence must always be anchored in truth. The workman's primary responsibility is to rightly handle the word of truth. Practical competence cannot exist apart from Scripture. As a minister takes on more responsibility, the need for disciplined biblical interpretation only grows.

4.1 Ministerial Competence as Character and Knowledge

One key takeaway is that character and knowledge shouldn't be seen as opposing forces. The qualifications for ministry outlined in the New Testament link teaching ability directly to a minister's character and reputation.[26] If a minister is well-versed in biblical doctrine but consistently behaves in

[26] 1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9.

ways that contradict Christian ethics, it creates a disjointed picture of competence. On the flip side, someone with outstanding character but lacking in biblical knowledge may struggle to meet the teaching demands of ministry.

Thus, the approved workman model views competence as a blend of what the minister knows who they are, and what they do. These three aspects need to be continuously integrated. Knowledge shapes practice; character guides how that knowledge is applied; and practice ultimately shows whether both knowledge and character are being lived out.

4.2 Ministerial Competence as Contextual Responsibility

In Africa, ministerial education unfolds in a variety of environments influenced by urbanization, rural settings, diverse denominations, traditional religious practices, economic challenges, educational disparities, digital communication, migration, and evolving church leadership dynamics. The approved workman model does not dictate a one-size-fits-all curriculum for these varied contexts. Instead, it offers guiding principles that help programs evaluate whether their educational approaches are equipping ministers to handle Scripture responsibly within their communities.

Contextual competence should encompass skills like active listening, cultural awareness, and effective communication, ethical decision-making and pastoral sensitivity. However, contextualization should not lead to bending Scripture to fit every cultural norm. African theological education must balance being attentive to context while remaining accountable to biblical truths. Bediako's focus on African Christian identity is particularly relevant here, while the biblical mandate for accurate interpretation serves as a crucial theological boundary.[27]

4.3 Ministerial Competence as Lifelong Formation

The approved workman is not a completed product at the point of graduation. The language of diligence and workmanship supports an understanding of continuing formation. Ministers encounter new pastoral situations, new cultural questions, new scholarship, new technologies, and new forms of doctrinal controversy. Lifelong learning is therefore not evidence that initial training failed; it is a normal feature of responsible ministry.

[27] Bediako, Theology and Identity, 1–12; Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa, 1–14.

Paul's instruction to Timothy elsewhere reinforces this continuing pattern. Timothy is told to give attention to reading, exhortation, and teaching, and to continue in the things he has learned.[28] The ministerial vocation includes continuing development rather than intellectual stagnation.

For African ministerial education, this suggests a movement from programme-centred formation toward formation that continues through mentoring, ministerial supervision, peer learning, theological reading, biblical study, conferences, research, and reflective practice. Such development should remain connected to Scripture rather than becoming professional development detached from Christian vocation.

5.0 Findings

The study produces five principal findings.

First, 2 Timothy 2:15 present ministerial competence as Godward rather than merely institution ward. The minister is commanded to present himself "unto God." Human institutions may certify and assess, but divine accountability remains the ultimate theological horizon.

Second, competence is procession. The command to be diligent indicates that ministerial capability requires sustained effort. The verse therefore supports a formation model rather than a one-time qualification model.

Third, approval is connected to testing. Dokimos contributes the idea of being examined and found genuine. Ministerial competence should therefore be demonstrable in knowledge, interpretation, character, and practice.

Fourth, competence in ministry is all about being vocational. A minister is essentially a worker, and this image highlights the importance of performance, responsibility, and the practical application of theological knowledge. That's why ministerial education should offer chances to practice ministry under proper supervision.

Fifth, we cannot separate competence from responsible biblical interpretation. The approved workman is closely linked to rightly handling the word of truth. Any approach to ministerial competence that sidelines biblical interpretation misses the heart of the matter.

[28] 1 Tim 4:13–16; 2 Tim 3:14–17.

All these insights come together to shape our definition: ministerial competence is the integrated and continually tested ability of a minister to understand, interpret, communicate, and embody the word of truth faithfully, diligently, and responsibly, both before God and within the faith community. This definition is more of a thoughtful synthesis of the study rather than a direct quote from the Bible.

6.0 Discussion

These findings give us a solid foundation to rethink what ministerial competence really means. If we narrow it down to just academic performance, a graduate might ace their exams but miss out on developing the practical and ethical skills needed for ministry. On the other hand, if we focus solely on ministry activities, someone could be super active without honing the exegetical skills necessary for responsible teaching. And if we equate competence with charisma or popularity, the minister might start prioritizing audience approval over accountability to God and Scripture.

The approved workman model offers a refreshing alternative by integrating these aspects within a unified theological framework. A minister studies because their work matters to God. They seek approval because ministry comes with accountability. They develop their skills because the work needs to be done with integrity. And they handle Scripture with care because the essence of ministry is the word of truth.

This integrated model plays a significant role in bridging the gap between theology and practice. Farley's critique of fragmented theological education is particularly relevant here, as separating disciplines can lead to a disjointed ministerial identity.[29] The approved workman model does not eliminate the need for disciplinary study; instead, it provides a vocational focus for these disciplines. Biblical studies, theology, church history, pastoral studies, ethics, and practical ministry can all come together to serve a cohesive ministerial purpose.

In the African context, it is crucial to pay attention to the social dynamics of ministry. Ministers often find themselves in communities where Christianity intersects with traditional beliefs, economic challenges, political and social pressures, family structures, education systems, and the influence of digital media. Therefore, competence in this setting means being able to interpret Scripture accurately while also communicating it clearly and applying it in a pastoral manner. Context does not replace Scripture; rather, it's the environment in which Scripture is faithfully taught and lived out.

[29] Farley, Theologia, 1–40.

This model also has important implications for assessment. If a program aims to develop approved workmen, then assessment should go beyond just written exams. Students should have opportunities to showcase their exegetical skills, preaching and teaching abilities, ethical judgment, pastoral skills, reflective thinking, and active participation in supervised ministry. Such assessments need to be thoughtfully designed to measure true formation rather than mere conformity to a specific institutional mould.

Lastly, the idea of divine approval must be approached with care. It should not create an environment where leaders feel they can claim unquestionable divine endorsement for their decisions. The phrase "approved unto God" is meant to remind ministers of their responsibility to present themselves before God; it does not give them the authority to equate their personal preferences with God's will. In fact, the same verse emphasizes the importance of rightly handling the word of truth, placing the worker under its discipline.

This study backs a model of ministerial authority that emphasizes accountability over self-preservation. The more authority a minister holds, the more seriously they should engage with Scripture, their character, on-going learning, correction, and accountability.

7.0 Impacts

The study presents several potential impacts worth considering.

Impact on theological education: The approved workman model can assist institutions in blending academic, spiritual, practical, and ethical development. It prompts program designers to think beyond just whether students have completed their courses, but also if they can showcase responsible ministerial skills.

Impact on the church**:** Churches stand to gain when ministers are trained to teach Scripture accurately, communicate it effectively, address doctrinal errors, and fulfil their pastoral duties. This model also encourages churches to view on-going ministerial development as a vital aspect of faithful stewardship.

Impact on ministers and students: The model helps learners develop a vocational identity that transcends merely obtaining credentials. Students are encouraged to see their studies as preparation for accountable service, rather than just a way to earn a title.

Impact on biblical scholarship: This model strengthens the connection between exegesis and ministry. Practical application does not undermine biblical scholarship; instead, diligent scholarship becomes part of the church's duty to handle Scripture with care.

Impact on African Christian communities: A contextually aware model can empower ministers to engage with African realities while staying rooted in Scripture. This could enhance the quality of theological communication, pastoral care, discipleship, and Christian education across various contexts.

It is important to view these impacts as proposed implications rather than proven outcomes. Future qualitative and quantitative research could explore how this model operates within specific seminaries, Bible colleges, universities, denominations, and local churches.

8.0 Recommendations

First off, theological institutions should think about broadening their definition of ministerial competence beyond just academic achievements. Program outcomes ought to encompass skills like biblical interpretation, effective communication, practical ministry experience, character development, and accountability.

Secondly, ministerial programs need to enhance their focus on supervised practice. Students should have well-structured chances to preach, teach, lead Bible studies, engage in pastoral care, and receive constructive feedback from experienced mentors.

Thirdly, it is essential for institutions to weave biblical interpretation throughout the entire curriculum. Exegesis should not be limited to a single department or phase of study. Students in pastoral ministry, Christian education, leadership, and practical theology should consistently show their ability to link ministry decisions with sound biblical interpretation.

Fourth, ministerial formation must explicitly include character and ethical development. The aim here is not to monitor students but to cultivate ministers who recognize that their ministry is accountable to both God and the church.

Fifth, African theological institutions should create resources for contextual learning. Students need to learn how to engage with local languages, cultures, social realities, traditional religious questions, contemporary media, and community needs, all while upholding biblical and theological integrity.

Sixth, both institutions and churches should set up continuing education opportunities for ministers after they graduate or are ordained. Reading groups, mentoring, theological seminars, research projects, preaching workshops, and pastoral supervision can all contribute to on-going development.

Seventh, the suggested "approved workman" model should be evaluated based on evidence rather than being accepted without question. Future research could look into student outcomes, ministerial practices, institutional curricula, mentoring systems, and how churches perceive competence.

Lastly, ministers should be cautious about equating public recognition with divine approval. Things like academic titles, ordination, social media clout, church size, or how popular a preacher is cannot replace the faithful handling of Scripture, a tested character, and accountable-workmanship.

9.0 Conclusion

This study has delved into 2 Timothy 2:15 as a biblical foundation for grasping ministerial competence through the idea of the "approved workman." The verse starts with the call for diligence, leads to presenting oneself before God for approval, identifies the minister as a worker who should not be ashamed, and wraps up with the importance of responsibly handling the word of truth. These components create a cohesive theological journey rather than just a list of unrelated qualifications.

The argument here is that ministerial competence goes beyond just academic success, practical experience, spiritual charisma, or institutional accolades. It is about the ongoing development of a minister whose knowledge, character, practice, and interpretation are all held accountable to God. The proposed model highlights four key dimensions—diligence, approval, workmanship, and right handling—and connects them meaningfully to biblical and theological knowledge, interpretation, character, practice, and accountability throughout a minister's lifelong journey.

For African ministerial education, this model provides a framework for balancing biblical fidelity with contextual responsibility. It doesn't dictate a one-size-fits-all curriculum for every institution, nor does it claim that 2 Timothy 2:15 lays out a modern educational system. Instead, it offers a Scripture-Governed theological principle from which educational practices can be developed, tested, revised, and evaluated.

The image of a dedicated workman shifts the focus from the minister's status to the ministry's stewardship. Essentially, the minister serves as a worker before God. So, the key question isn't just

about whether the minister is recognized, qualified, influential, or successful by human standards; it is about whether the work is being carried out with diligence, responsibility, honesty, and integrity. In this light, 2 Timothy 2:15 serves as a rigorous foundation for ministerial training: the worker must study, be tested, work hard, and rightly handle the word of truth.

This article aims to contribute both theologically and educationally. It urges African ministerial education to produce not just graduates, but Scripture-guided workmen—ministers whose skills are continually nurtured under the authority of Scripture and whose ministries are held accountable to God.

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