



APPROVED

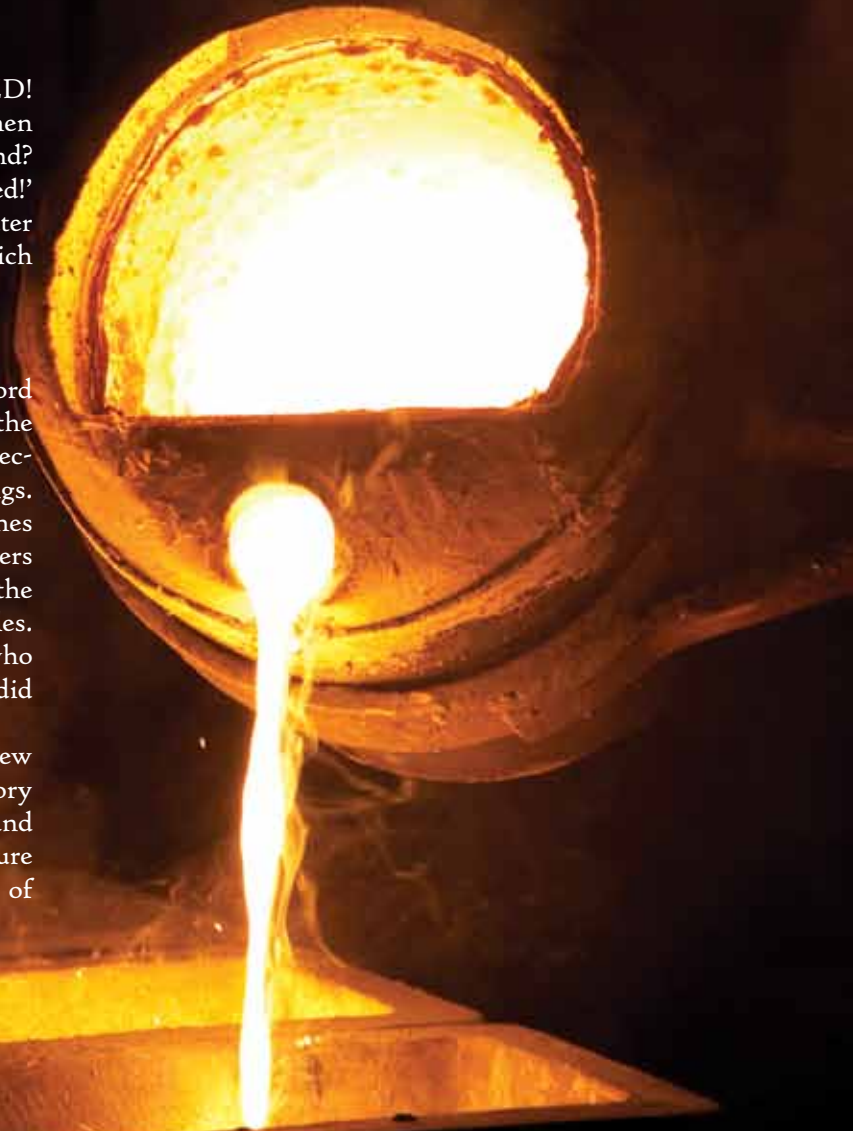
A Word Study

WHAT A GREAT WORD: APPROVED! In the banker's office? "Approved!" When asking a father for his daughter's hand? "Approved!" Before the throne of God? "Approved!" Whether spoken or implied, no word offers a better concept, more relief, or a firmer foundation on which to stand. Approved!

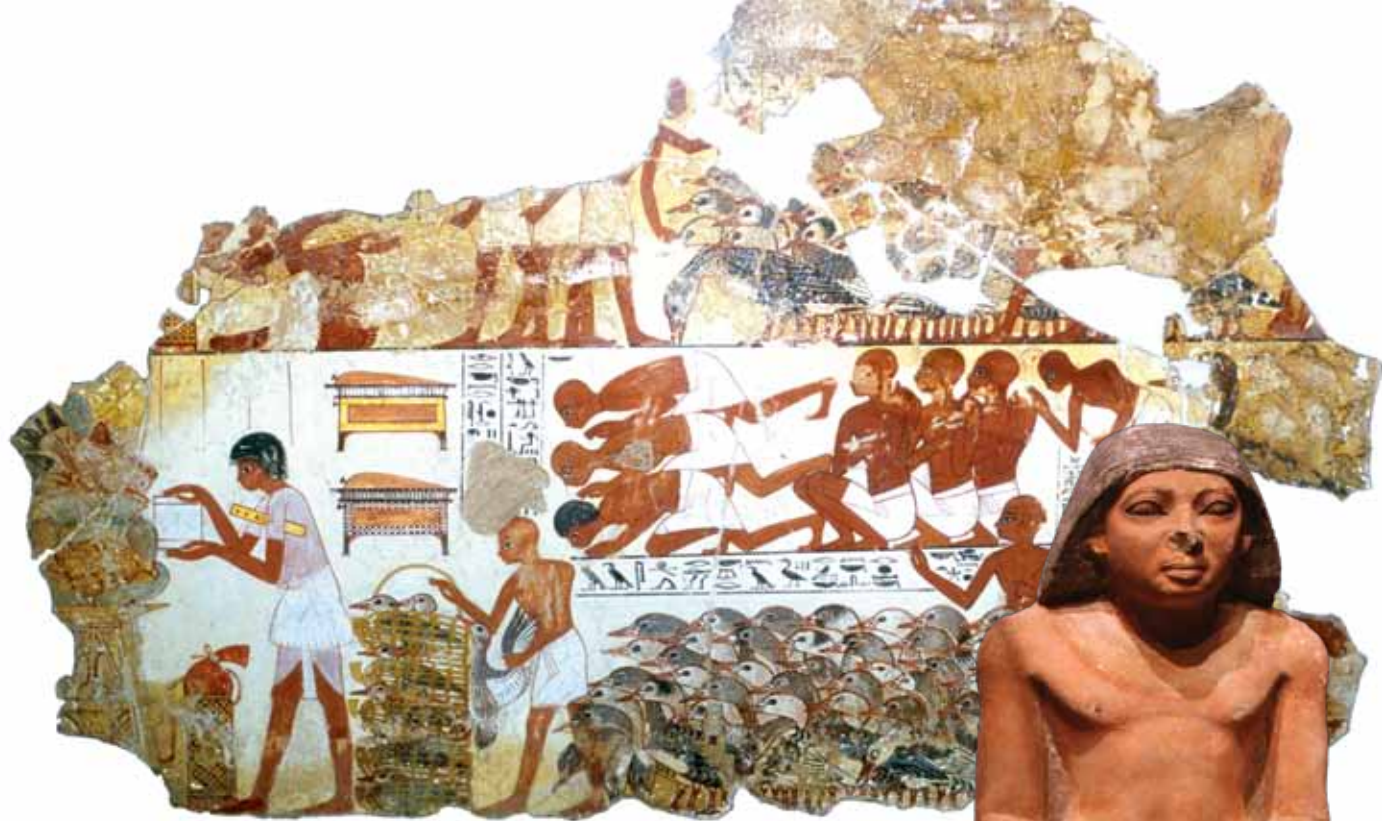
Background

Translated from the Greek *dokimos*, Paul used the word "approved" or its cognates *dokimazo* and *adokimos*, the first meaning "to test" or "to establish by trial," the second meaning "unqualified," 30 times in his writings. Just how important this concept was for Paul becomes evident when we see that the New Testament writers used the Greek terms only seven other times. Of the 22 uses of the verbal form, 17 are in the Pauline Epistles. In writing to the Romans, Paul spoke of "Apelles, who [was] approved in Christ" (Rom. 16:10).¹ What did Paul mean when he said Apelles was *approved*?

Not restricted to the religious use of the New Testament, the Greek word *dokimos* has a rich history in the secular literature of the intertestamental and New Testament periods. Writers of classical literature used the verbal form *dokimazo*, carrying the sense of



BY RANDALL ADKISSON



Above: Scene from Nebamun's Tomb at Thebes, Egypt shows geese being driven, counted, and inspected, likely before being brought into the house of the king; dated 1400 B.C.



Right: Limestone statue from Giza, Egypt; dated to 3rd millennium B.C.; depicts Nefu, who was inspector of the treasury.

approval thorough testing, to denote materials that were genuine, valuable, and useful. People verified coins and precious metals as being genuine through testing fires. We can begin to see rich meaning for other uses of the term when we see that objects or persons were proven as valuable, worthy, or significant through the harshest of tests or circumstances.

Such meaning clearly is in the term's use in the *Septuagint*, which the Jews had used extensively for two centuries before the New Testament period. In this Greek translation of the Old Testament, the verb *dokimazo* often translates the Hebrew *bachan*, a word meaning to "test for genuineness by fire."² People used such testing both to assay value and to refine for worth.

The term's implications of value expanded from applying only to materials to applying to men. Old Testament writers thus used the word group extensively to speak of God testing and refining Israel. In Psalm 66:10, "For You, God, tested us; You refined us as silver is refined." And in the prophets, "I have appointed you to be an assayer among My people—a refiner—so you may know and assay their way of life" (Jer. 6:27). And "I will put this third through the fire; I will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say: They are My people, and they will say: Yahweh is our God" (Zech. 13:9).

David requested such testing, being confident that God would find him true and genuine in his faith and service to the Lord. So he penned, "Test me, LORD, and try me; examine my heart and mind" (Ps. 26:2). And perhaps in a more humble vein David wrote, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my

concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23-24).

Standing Approved

Paul used the Greek adjective *dokimos* six times. In Romans 14:18, he paired it with a synonym, *euaestros*, to speak of the good standing one acquires by uniting grace with wisdom when dealing with others. Believers are acceptable to God and approved by men as they pursue peace with—and edification of fellow believers when in midst of controversy. Here, "approved" seems to apply generally to include the approval of the apostle, approval from other discerning individuals, and approval from God Himself.

Controversy permeates the use of *dokimos* in 1 Corinthians 11:19 where the term describes those who

Smelting area at Timna in southern Israel.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: KRISTEN HILLER (4/20/13)

rose above the petty social distractions that were bringing disunity to the Corinthian church. In doing so, these believers showed themselves useful to God's work. Here Paul profitably contrasted the term with its antonym *adokimos*, meaning "disqualified for useful service," which he had used in 1 Corinthians 9:27: "Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

Paul's use of *dokimos* seems clearly to indicate fitness for service. When he again wrote to the Corinthian congregation, he invoked the term to indicate God's approval of his work, contrasting such approval with that which his opponents claimed (2 Cor. 10:18). The successes of his church planting efforts were clear to see. The Lord had shown His approval. Opponents' claims were merely self-boasted. As with his usage in his first letter to the congregation, Paul invoked the term in an atmosphere of controversy.

Paul made full use of *dokimos* and its cognates to defend the validity of his apostleship (2 Cor. 13:5-7). "Examine yourselves" in verse 5 translates *dokimazo*, the verbal form, while "fail the test" translates the antonym *adokimo*. Paul again employed the antonym as a double negative to emphasize his work's validity. Stiffly translated: "Now I hope that you will recognize that we ourselves are not not-approved" (v. 6, writer's translation).

Tying his argument in near poetic fashion, Paul used *dokimos*, translated "approved," and *adokimos*, translated "unapproved," in a final argumentative flurry. The apostle argued sarcastically that if the Corinthians were

YOU'RE NOT FOOLIN' ME!



FROM THE EARLY 5TH TO 1ST CENTURIES B.C., THE COINS OF ATHENS WERE familiar throughout the Greek world. Demand for imitations grew, especially of the Athenian "owl" coins. Shown (left) are authentic silver tetradrachms dated to late 5th century B.C. The two coins on the right are imitations of Athenian silver from Yemen, dated to the 2nd century B.C. As the Athenians changed the styles of their coins, the look of the imitations changed as well.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: BRITISH MUSEUM/LONDON (31/12/6/62 & 65)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/KRISTEN HILLER/ ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM/ TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY (45/2137)

Above: Using a design dated from 13th–12th centuries B.C., replica of a clay-lined shaft smelting furnace; this type furnace typically had three air nozzles; at Tel Aviv, Israel.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ/ HATAY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (12/15/7)

Right: Hoard of gold coins; found in Antioch of Syria (modern Turkey).

to judge their own faith as approved, then as a result they must find Paul also approved as an apostle. Their standing in the faith proved the effectiveness of Paul’s apostleship, the one who brought them to faith.

Paul used the adjective “approved” in one further instance, to encourage the work of his protégé Timothy. Interestingly, the usage is again in the context of controversy. Paul instructed the younger pastor to tutor his charges (2 Tim. 2:2) with solemn warnings not to enter into fruitless arguments over words (v. 14). Such petty disagreements over minor matters would lead to catastrophe. Instead of being drawn into such a catastrophe, Timothy was to strive to be one whose standing before God is “approved” (v. 15). Timothy could have such a standing through the correct use of the Scriptures, in contrast to its petty argumentative use indicated in verse 14.

Of the other writers of the New Testament, only James makes use of the adjective *dokimos*. James opened

his epistle with admonitions to steadfast endurance under the various trials of life. At James 1:12 he called those “blessed” who persevere under such trials, “because being approved,” one gains the crown of life (writer’s translation). The clear connection between testing and approval is as apparent with James as with Paul.

Conclusion

So who was Apelles? Mentioned in the Scriptures only once, “Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ” (Rom. 16:10a), we have little direct information concerning him. Obviously, the Romans knew him; he was presumably a member of the Roman church. His importance to Paul, though, is evident; he was 1 of the 26 people the apostle singled out for greeting among the believers living in Rome.

Although we know nothing of Apelles’s work or hardships through direct narrative, perhaps we can surmise much from his appellation. Apelles was the only one Paul described with the word *dokimos*. Further, he was not merely approved; he stood “approved in Christ.”

Considering that each use of the adjective *dokimos* denoted one tested by the fires of controversy, yet one whose actions and attitudes proved him to be valuable to fellow believers and Christ, we can conclude that Apelles was one who had proven such worth. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that, “each one’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because in fire it will be revealed, and the fire itself will test what sort of work each has done” (1 Cor. 3:13, writer’s translation). Through the fires of tribulation, Apelles had proven himself fit for service, accomplished, and useful to Christ. **Approved!**

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

2. Hermann Haarbeck, “Tempt, Test, Approve: *dokimos*” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 4:808.

Randall Adkisson is senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Cookeville, Tennessee.