

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Study to show thyself approved
unto God, a workman that
needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of
truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

This verse of Scripture ought to be very meaningful to those of us who are accountable to the Chief Shepherd of the flock. God has committed unto us sixty-six infallible, inerrant Books which we are to faithfully study, allowing the truth of His Word to become part of the very fabric of our being. We are then to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation (judgment)" (James 3:1). We are certainly not to take this awesome responsibility lightly.

C.I. Scofield authored a very helpful booklet. Its title (*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*) is derived from the above verse of Scripture. This is what Scofield says in the introduction:

In the second chapter of Second Timothy the believer is presented in seven characters. He is called a son, verse 1; a soldier, verse 3; an athlete, verse 5; a husbandman, verse 6; a workman, verse 15; a vessel, verse 21; and a servant, verse 24.

With each of these characters there is a *suited* exhortation. As a son, Timothy is exhorted to be strong in grace. *Grace* goes with *sonship*, just as *law* goes with *servitude*--as we learn from Galatians. Then, as a soldier, Timothy is exhorted to endure hardness, and to avoid worldly entanglements; these are right elements of good soldiership. As a vessel, he is to be cleansed, separated; as a servant, gentle, patient, meek; and so of each of these seven aspects of his life as a Christian.

In verse 15 he is told what is required of him as a *workman*:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*"

The Word of Truth, then, has right divisions, and it must be evident that, as one cannot be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" without observing them, so *any study* of that Word which ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing. Many Christians freely confess that they find the

study of the Bible weary work. More find it so, who are ashamed to make the confession.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to indicate the more important divisions of the Word of God.

Scofield then proceeds, in his brief, lawyer-like, logical style, to explain the following Biblical distinctions:

The differences between the Jew, the Gentile and the Church of God.

The differences between the seven dispensations.

The differences between the two advents of Christ.

The differences between the two resurrections.

The differences between the five judgments.

The differences between law and grace.

The differences between the believer's standing and state.

The differences between salvation and rewards.

The differences between believers and professors.

When such differences are not observed and understood, then great confusion results. For example, reformed theology often fails to distinguish between the two resurrections and between the various judgments, and the result is that they teach one general resurrection and one general judgment which takes place at the end of the world. This would be like a professor of history looking back at the twentieth century and saying that World War I and World War II and the Vietnam War and the Gulf War were actually all one giant war and should not be treated as separate wars. I should not like to have him as my professor for history! I would be utterly confused by this professor's propensity to blur all distinctions and lump everything together as one!

Let us now get back to our verse:

Study--Although the idea of "study" is certainly conveyed by this verse, this particular word actually means "be diligent, make every effort, exert yourself, give your utmost effort." The word is used in Ephesians 4:3--"endeavoring (making every effort) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is used in Hebrews 4:11--"We are to be diligent and to make every effort to enter into God's rest."

to show thyself approved unto God--We are to make every effort to present ourselves before God as approved workmen! When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ we want to hear Him say, "Well done My good and faithful student! You have learned from Me. You have correctly handled and faithfully taught My Word of truth." We want God's approval, not only for how we live our life, but for how we study His Word.

a workman that needeth not to be ashamed--Bible study is hard work and yet very rewarding. There are precious gems to be found, but finding them involves laborious work and great effort. Digging is not easy. Spurgeon said, "There are some precious jewels which may be discovered even by the wayfaring man, but the mass of the gold is hidden in the bowels of the earth; and he who would be rich in

these treasures, must dig into Scripture. Thou must go down into its depths, and thou must rummage there until thou gettest at last at the treasure." May we be among those who "labour (toil to the point of weariness and exhaustion) in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17). Woe be unto the lazy and slothful workman who will be ashamed before Christ for his failure to "give himself wholly" to the study of the Word (1 Timothy 4:16).

rightly dividing the Word of Truth--the word "rightly dividing" literally means "to rightly cut, to cut straight."

2 Timothy 2:15

**Rightly
Dividing**

ORTHOTOMEΟ

ὀρθοτομέω

**ORTHO=straight,
right**

TOMEΟ=to cut

The Bible student is to very carefully cut and divide the Word of God in order to understand it aright. As an illustration of this, consider the dissection of the human body. In medical school the students actually work with a human cadaver. It is very difficult to learn about the human body apart from having an actual human body to dissect.

The medical student first needs to realize that the body needs to be very carefully cut. You would not want to put it through a wood chopper or take a butcher knife to it. But with the right instruments and specialized knives, very careful cuts can be made. The whole purpose of the dissection is to learn about the human body. As the student examines the human body he is looking for both similarities and differences. He sees veins and arteries which in some ways are similar but in other ways are different. The small intestines are similar to the large intestines, but there are differences also, especially in size.

The medical student also notices that there are some things that run throughout the body but there are other things that are found in only one section of the body. For example, the circulatory system runs throughout the body as does the nervous system, but the digestive system runs through only the top half of the person and not in the legs. The same is true for the respiratory system. The reproductive system is even more localized.

In much the same way, when we study God's Word we must carefully cut and dissect the Word of truth. We are to note the things that are similar and the things that are different. For example, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the twelve disciples and the seventy disciples all preached the same message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9). This is an example of similarity. The commission given by Christ to the disciples in Matthew 10 was intended for Israel only, not for the Gentiles and not for the Samaritans (Matthew 10:5-6). The commission given by Christ to the disciples after the resurrection was intended for all nations, including the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This is an example of a clear difference.

There are many things in life that need to be distinguished. Certain differences must be recognized and understood. For example, snakes are snakes, but most people would want to distinguish between a harmless garter snake and a deadly rattlesnake. Mushrooms are mushrooms, but those who gather mushrooms for eating must make a difference between the kinds that are edible (fit to be eaten) and the kinds that are not edible and even poisonous. So also there are many things in God's Word that need to be carefully distinguished.

The diligent workman also notices that there are certain things that are found throughout the Bible. Here are some examples: 1) the way of salvation---always "by grace through faith"; 2) the nature and character of God--He never changes; 3) the nature and character of Satan; 4) the sinfulness of sin; 5) the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart; etc. There are other things that do not run throughout the Bible: 1) Worshippers once brought a lamb, but this is not the case today; 2) Under the law there were certain foods that were not to be eaten, but today every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused (1 Tim. 4:4); 3) Some animals are ferocious and carnivorous today but there is coming a time when this will not be the case (Isaiah 11); 4) God's temple used to be a magnificent building constructed by the Jews but today God's temple is a body of believers (1 Cor. 3:16); etc.

This was the purpose of Scofield's booklet, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. It was written to help believers understand things in God's Word that need to be distinguished. If we confuse the judgment seat of Christ (which is for believers) with the Great White Throne Judgment (which is for the unsaved) then only confusion can result. If a passage is speaking of a professing believer and we think it is talking about a true believer, then we could easily fall prey to the error that a believer can lose his salvation (there's a big difference between professing Christ and possessing Christ--1 John 5:12). For a discussion of some of these key differences see **THE TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST, THE FIVE JUDGMENTS and THE TWO RESURRECTIONS.**

May the God of truth enable us to carefully and rightly dissect His precious Word, allowing God's Word to say what it says, remembering that God says what He means and means what He says. May we be those who tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:1-2).