

## 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."

- II Tim. 2:15

Those who seek to teach the Word rightly divided frequently encounter the objection that "*All [or every] Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . .*" (II Tim. 3:16). It is argued from this passage that it is dishonoring to God to divide the Bible into dispensations and emphasize the differences between them, since it is *all* for us, from Genesis I to Revelation 22.

Does this mean, then, that II Tim. 2:15 and II Tim. 3:16 contradict each other? Surely they do not. The fact is that, written only a few paragraphs apart, by the same author, to the same person, about the same Book, these two verses *complement* each other. II Tim. 2:15 explains *how* God's workman may get most out of the Bible, while II Tim. 3:16 declares that *all* of it was given for his profit.

All Scripture is indeed profitable when "rightly divided," but when wrongly divided or not divided at all, the truth is changed into a lie and becomes most unprofitable. Thus II Tim. 2:15 is the key to II Tim. 3:16 and to the *understanding* and enjoyment of the Word of truth.

One difficulty is that multitudes of Christians shrink from the *effort* involved in *studying* the Scriptures with a view to rightly dividing them. And, alas, their spiritual leaders often encourage them in their lethargy.

Some years ago we heard a preacher exclaim: "Some say, 'This is for the Jew and that is for the church. This is for us and that is not for us.' I take a *whole* Bible!" Did he mean that we should *not* distinguish between God's program for Israel in Old Testament times and His program for the body of Christ today? Certainly not, but it sounded so. Did he mean that those who *do* thus divide the Word do *not* believe the whole Bible? No, but he gave that impression. He discouraged his hearers from endeavoring to rightly divide the Word of truth by implying that those who do so discard parts of the Bible as not for them. And this preacher was representative of a large proportion of the spiritual leaders in the church today. Is it any wonder that the Christian masses use the Bible merely for devotional reading and often neglect even that? How can they be expected to have an interest in the *study* of the Scriptures when their leaders themselves fail to set the example? And one need but look about him to see the delinquency here.

Where are the Bible teachers of yesterday? What has happened to the great Bible conferences that were held all over the land? How many pastors *teach* the Word to their congregations? And the missionaries and evangelists: is there not a widespread feeling that they do not need to study the Scriptures too thoroughly since "their business is to win souls"?

As a result, the vast majority of believers really *understand* very little of God's Word. They know the basic facts of salvation but seem quite satisfied to remain ignorant of precious truths which, if they but searched to find them, would make them *workmen* whom God could approve, not needing to be ashamed of their service for Him.

But rather than *study* to attain to a better *understanding* of the Word and become proficient in its use, many actually boast that they are satisfied with "the simple things"! And this after all the earnest prayers of Paul that believers might have the spirit of *wisdom* and *revelation* in the *knowledge* of Christ (Eph. 1:17), that they might *know* what is theirs in Christ (Eph. 1:18-23) and *comprehend* the breadth and length and depth and height of it! (Eph. 3:18). This after all his *labor* and *strife* and

*conflict* that they might have "*the full assurance of understanding*"! (Col. 1:28-2:2). This after all his prayers that they might "be filled with the *knowledge* of His will in all *wisdom* and *spiritual understanding*" (Col. 1:9). This after his stern rebuke of those carnal babes to whom he could preach no more than Christ *crucified*; whom he had to feed with milk alone because they were not able to digest solid food! (I Cor. 2 and 3).

Slothful Christians often consider themselves quite spiritual merely because their *emotions* are easily aroused. They boast of their contentment with "the simple things" while they should be ashamed of their indifference to the written Word of God. They claim great devotion to God, yet neglect the one great means of knowing Him better. They profess fervent faith in Him, yet scarcely trouble to find out *just what He has said*. They do not, like David, meditate upon God's Word day and night nor, like the prophets, "enquire and search diligently" as to its true meaning.

The results of this attitude toward the Word are appalling, for such may trust Christ for salvation, but beyond this they exercise, in most cases, a blind, superstitious faith that cannot but *dishonor* God. *Feelings* are taken for *facts* and their own *wishes* for God's *Word*. They go into wrong paths, saying, "But I prayed very earnestly about it and now feel perfectly at peace." They say, "The Lord spoke to me," and refer to some *feeling* rather than to some passage of Scripture consistently applied. Thoughtlessly they say, "*If it's in the Bible I believe it,*" yet as they read the Bible they take to themselves only what warms their hearts and leave the rest unapplied, not knowing exactly why.

But those who boast of their contentment with "the simple things" and oppose dispensational Bible study on the ground that all the Bible is for us, have certainly missed the fact that all Scripture was given that the man of God might be *perfectly fitted and fully equipped for his work* (See II Tim. 3:17). There is a great difference between the "child of God" and the "*man of God*" and no one who remains an infant in the truth can be approved as a workman for God or as a *soldier* of Jesus Christ, for the workmen God approves must know how to rightly divide the Word of truth and the soldiers He honors must know how to wield the Sword of the Spirit.

We can sympathize with those who have *begun* to study the Bible dispensationally and have found it confusing. The study of almost any subject is confusing at first, but as we persevere we begin to *understand* and to reap the fruits of our toil. Indeed, to any thoughtful person the Scriptures must continue to be confusing until he learns to rightly divide and so to *understand* them. And what joy can compare with that of coming into a fuller understanding of God's Word?

It is written concerning the great spiritual revival under Ezra, when the law was read and explained to the people of Israel:

**"And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, BECAUSE THEY HAD UNDERSTOOD THE WORDS THAT WERE DECLARED UNTO THEM" (Neh. 8:12).**

On the resurrection morning two disciples trudged wearily toward Emmaus, heart-broken because their Master had been crucified. They did not understand that according to the prophetic Word He *must* suffer and die before entering into His glory. Then the Lord Jesus Himself drew near and, unrecognized, explained this to them from the Scriptures until they understood and believed and rejoiced.

**"And they said one to another, DID NOT OUR HEART BURN WITHIN US, WHILE HE TALKED WITH US BY THE WAY, AND WHILE HE OPENED TO US THE SCRIPTURES?" (Luke 24:32).**

Studying the Bible dispensationally may seem confusing at first but actually it dispels confusion, explains difficult problems, reconciles seeming contradictions and lends power to the believer's ministry. If I should step inside a modern United States Post Office all would doubtless seem very confusing to me. But it would be a mistake to suggest piling all the mail neatly in one corner and handing it out promiscuously to all comers as some would do with the Bible. The postal employees must "rightly divide" the mail so that each person receives what is addressed to him. What seems like confusion to the novice is really a simplification of the work to be done in getting each person's private mail to him.

It is granted that in the Bible even that which was addressed to those of other dispensations is given to us for our learning and profit, but we must not confuse this with our own private mail or make the mistake of carrying out instructions meant particularly for others. While I am reading mail addressed personally to *me*, a friend may hand me, for my interest or information, mail addressed to *him*. His mail and mine may all prove informative and profitable, but I must still be careful not to confuse the two, expecting to receive things promised to him or carrying out instructions addressed to him.

Thus all the Bible is *for* us, but it is not all addressed to us or written about us, and if we would really understand and enjoy it; if we would really know how to use it effectively in service for Christ, we must be careful always to note who is addressing whom, about what and when and why.