

# Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. II Timothy 3:16,17

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

The two passages quoted above give God's instructions concerning His Word "All scripture" is inspired by God. Every word in Scripture is from the mouth of God and is of absolute authority. As such, those words should be studied carefully. The word "study" indicates more than just a casual reading. One could spend an evening casually reading a book about World War II, but a lifetime studying the military, political, and economic impact of that historic event. Likewise, if we want to understand the detail of God's Word we must study it.

## Right Division – Does It Really Matter?

Along with God's admonition to study He also gives instruction concerning *how* to study. The method or system we use to study God's Word is, "rightly dividing the word of truth." Miles Coverdale perhaps best stated the principle of right division. In the introduction to his English translation of the Bible he wrote, "It will greatly help you to understand scripture if you note – not only what is spoken and written, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follows." Right division involves considering each word of the inspired words of Scripture in its proper context.

A simple but telling illustration asks the question, "What does God want me to eat?" A brief survey of the Bible reveals a variety of different answers to that question.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. Genesis 1:29

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. Genesis 9:1-3

And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat. . . . These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye

eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you: . . . And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, Leviticus 11:1-3,9,10,13

For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; I Timothy 4:4

Adam, Noah, Moses, and Paul each give a different answer to our simple question because each of them had received a different revelation from God regarding diet.

There is a system of study that determines which of God's commandments we follow. We cannot arbitrarily pick and choose the ones that suit our fancy. Neither can we try to impose a man-made system on God's book. Right division provides us with a God-given, objective system to study God's Word.

## Heaven and Earth

Since God tells us to rightly divide the Word of Truth, it seems fitting that He also tells us *how* to do it. In Scripture God reveals a basic division that lasts from Genesis to Revelation.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Genesis 1:1

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. Revelation 21:1

The division God revealed in Scripture is between heaven and earth. All that God has done, is doing, or will do is predicated upon His division of the universe into heaven and earth. Following this principle the Scriptures divide themselves according to God's system of right division.

Continuing in the first chapter of Genesis God's plan initially focused on the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Genesis 1:2

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Genesis 1:28

After the flood God gave similar instructions to Noah and his sons. His earthly focus had not changed.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. Genesis 9:1

With the setting aside of Abraham to begin the formation of the nation Israel God's focus was still on the earth.

And I will bless them that bless thee [Abraham], and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. Genesis 12:3

The singular message of the prophets is the establishment of God's righteous rule and reign on a renewed earth. Daniel's vision serves as a template for all Old Testament prophecy.

Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. . . . And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Daniel 2:35,44

The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles continued the prophetic focus on the earth. Christ was presented to Israel as the rightful heir to the earthly throne of David and the apostles tied their message and its returning, triumphant Messiah to the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Luke 1:30-33

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:19-21

All of the facts above show us that during the time frame covered from Genesis 1:2 to Acts 9 the focus of God's message was on the earth. However, in the ninth chapter of Acts we see a significant change begin to take place as Jesus Christ speaks from heaven to a man who would become the Apostle of the Gentiles.

And as he [Saul] journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Acts 9:3-5

Paul had a calling that was heavenly in nature. Among the apostles Paul alone was called, not by an earthly Christ, but by an ascended and glorified Christ. Setting aside Paul as the Apostle of the Gentiles marks a change in God's focus from the earth to heaven.

In the book of Ephesians Paul makes it clear that the focus of his ministry is heaven.

The Body of Christ to whom Paul ministered is blessed in heavenly places; seated in heavenly places; a witness to beings in heavenly places; and fighting a battle against the powers in heavenly places.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: Ephesians 1:3

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in

heavenly places in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 2:6

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, Ephesians 3:10

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Ephesians 6:12

Paul wants us to understand that the eternal destiny of the Body of Christ is in the heavenlies, not on the earth.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. I Thessalonians 4:16-18

Our comfort is not found in the return of Christ to establish an earthly kingdom as it was for Israel. Our comfort is in Christ catching us away from this earth to reign with Him for all eternity in the heavenlies. Our eternal destiny and conversation is in heaven, not on the earth.

### **The People of Right Division**

God has a group of people set apart as uniquely His to fulfill his purpose in the earth. And he has a group of people set apart as uniquely His to fulfill his plan in the heavens.

To fulfill His purpose on the earth, God created a nation. This nation's formation and growth was superintended in a supernatural way. This special nation was formed from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the nation of Israel.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Romans 9:6-13

Why did God take such care in forming Israel? Why did he bless them above all other nations of the earth? God blessed Israel so that through them all the nations of the earth might glorify Him. Israel fulfills His purpose in the earth. Through Israel the inhabitants of the earth will glorify God.

Paul speaks of a new creation. Unlike Israel this creation is not based on national distinction. This new creation is a spiritual body in which believers are united to one another and to Christ as our head.

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken

down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. Ephesians 2:11-17

Paul describes conditions in time past when God dealt with and through His national creation, Israel. At that time the Gentile nations were outside of the covenants that God made with Israel, so much so that they were “without God in the world.” God has now eliminated the divisions of time past and reconciled Jews and Gentiles together in Christ. This joining of Jew and Gentile together with Christ as our head forms “one body,” a “new man.” The one body and the new man are one in the same. They are the new creation, the Church, the Body of Christ.

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Ephesians 1:22,23

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. I Corinthians 12:12,13,27

Ephesians teaches that the blessing, position, ministry, and warfare of the Church, the Body of Christ are centered in the heavenly places. God’s purpose for the Body of Christ reaches its ultimate fulfillment when we reach our heavenly home and take our positions of authority over the angels.

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Philippians 3:20,21

Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? I Corinthians 6:3

Just as Israel fulfills God’s purpose in the earth, so the Body of Christ fulfills His purpose in the heavens. Through the Church, the Body of Christ the inhabitants of the heavens will glorify God.

### **A Rightly Divided Life**

The goal of rightly dividing the Word of Truth is not to just make an intellectual exercise of the Scriptures but to apply the principles of God’s Word to our lives. God desires to carry out his purpose both on earth and in heaven and to do that He created two distinct groups of people.

Israel is a physical, earthly people, and God deals first and foremost with them in a physical nature. Israel had physical deliverance they could “see” and waited for spiritual deliverance when God would take away their sins.

And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. Exodus 14:13,14

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the

day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:31-34

The Body of Christ is a spiritual, heavenly people. God’s dealings with us are first and foremost spiritual in nature. We have spiritual redemption as an unseen blessing in heavenly places and wait for our physical deliverance when God will redeem our physical bodies.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Ephesians 1:3-7

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Romans 8:22-25

Rightly dividing the Word of Truth helps us understand the distinction between God’s two called-out groups of people and the purpose and blessings for each.

### **Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth**

Rightly dividing the Word of Truth is God’s prescribed system of Bible study. Without it the Bible is a hopeless hodge-podge of contradictory statements. Right division allows the Scriptures to come alive by putting each and every word in its proper context and allowing it to mean what God intended it to mean.

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*“...to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery...”*

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