

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth”

By Bobby Witherington

“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. (15) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:14-15).

The second epistle of Paul to Timothy, his *“own son in the faith”* (1 Tim. 1:2), was written from prison (apparently in Rome) at a time when Paul’s *“departure”* (his death) was *“at hand,”* a time when Demas had *“forsaken”* him, when Alexander the coppersmith had done him *“much evil,”* and when he had also been forsaken by others (2 Tim. 4:6, 10, 14, 16). In this epistle Paul sought to encourage Timothy to *“be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus,”* to commit what he had *“heard”* from Paul to *“faithful men, who shall be able to teach others,”* to be aware that *“in the last days perilous times shall come,”* and therefore to *“preach the word,”* being *“instant in season,”* and *“out of season,”* to *“reprove, rebuke,”* and *“exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Tim. 4:1-2). In order for Timothy to thus honor these obligations, it was necessary for him to warn his hearers to *“strive not about words to no profit,”* and of his own need to study to show himself *“approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:14-15). That which Timothy had *“heard”* from Paul, he (Timothy) was to *“commit... to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim. 2:2). In other words, these same instructions were to be committed to *“faithful men,”* who would then *“be able to teach others also,”* meaning that if we are *“faithful,”* we will personally heed these instructions, and will *“commit”* them to others, who then will also endeavor to *“teach others.”* “The bottom line” therefore is this: the instructions in our opening text (2 Tim. 2:14-15) are as applicable to us as they were to Timothy! That being the case, it therefore behooves us to examine these verses more closely.

With regards to our text, we note both a positive and a negative. **Negatively,** we should encourage others to *“strive not about words to no profit”* (things not taught in the scriptures) and which lead to *“the subverting”* (*“the ruin”* – NKJV) *of the hearers”* (v. 14). False doctrine, believed and obeyed, leads to *“the subverting”* or *“the ruin”* of those who are thereby misled. Remember that Jesus said *“ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). Regardless of what we so often hear, it **does** make a difference as to what we believe and obey religiously!

Now for the **positive** side of these instructions. Paul said, *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15). It should be the goal of every accountable person to be *“approved unto God,”* to be a *“workman that needeth not to be ashamed.”* For this to occur we, too, must *“study”* (KJV), or *“be diligent”* (NKJV). *“Study or be diligent in what,”* you may ask. Obviously, we must *“study”* or *“be diligent”* in making a determined effort to *“rightly”* divide *“the word of truth.”* God *“cannot lie”* (Titus 1:2); in fact, it is *“impossible for God to lie”* (Heb. 6:18)! Therefore, what God says is *“the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15). God’s word *“is truth”* (John 17:17). However, even *“the word of truth”* must be *“rightly”* divided! The very command to *“rightly”* divide *“the word of truth”* necessarily infers that it is possible to **wrongly** divide *“the word of truth.”* Not only is it possible to wrongly divide *“the word of truth,”* this is something which occurs continually throughout the world! For example, many people just begin to read “wherever the Bible falls open,” without giving any regard whatever as to **who** is speaking, **to whom** the text is being addressed, or even to the **context** of the text being read! No competent historian would take that approach in reading a book on history, nor would any competent physician, in treating a cancer patient, just go to a library, take out a book at random, and just begin reading here “the book falls open.” Yet millions of people the world-over take this approach in reading the Bible. Think of this for a moment: If every religious leader throughout the world would take the Bible as his only religious guide, and then *“rightly”* divide *“the word of truth,”* there would be **no** religious denomination in the world! Sadly, though the Bible is often highly praised, it is sel-

dom **“rightly”** divided!

“Rightly dividing the word of truth” requires making a distinction between the past and the present. With this in mind, please note Hebrews 1:1,2: **“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”**

Please note: Herein the writer makes a distinction between **“time past,”** and **“these last days.”** In time past God spoke **“unto the father by the prophets;”** **“In these last days,”** He has **“spoken unto us by His Son.”** The expression **“in time past”** refers to what we call The Old Testament. **“These last days”** refer to what we call the New Testament. In time past God spoke **“unto the fathers by the prophets. “In these last days”** (the days in which we now live, bw) God has **“spoken by His Son”** (Heb. 1:2), Who is **“the mediator of the New Testament”** (Heb. 9:15), and through which He (Jesus) speaks to us today.

The history covered in the Bible includes **three** dispensations (or biblical time periods), those being The Patriarchal age (in which God spoke to the people through the fathers, or patriarchs), The Law of Moses (which God gave to the Jews through Moses), and the Gospel age which began on the day of Pentecost and will last until Jesus returns to judge the world. Interestingly, the third chapter of Galatians deals with those exact time periods! First, we refer to the patriarchal period (Gen. 1:1 – Exodus 19) when God made promise to Abraham, saying **“in you all the nations shall be blessed”** (Gal. 3:8; cf. Gen. 12:3). Secondly, we note **“the law of Moses”** which was given 430 years later (Gal. 3:17), which was given at Horeb or Sinai to Israel (Deut. 5:1), which was given **“because of transgressions till the Seed should come”** (Gal. 3:19), and **Jesus Christ** is specifically identified as being that promised **“seed”** (Gal. 3:12). Jesus was born while **“the law of Moses”** was still in effect (Luke 2:22-24). He did not come to destroy the law, but to **“fulfill the law”** (Matt. 5:17-18), referred to in Colossians 2:14 as **“the handwriting of ordinances”** and which the inspired apostle Paul said He has done away, having **“taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”** With regards to the law of Moses we note three important facts: (a) **“We are not under the law”** (Rom. 10:4); (b) We are dead to the law and delivered from it (Rom. 7:6), and Jesus Christ is the end of the law Moses (Rom. 10:4), and is now **“the mediator of the New Testament”** (Heb. 9:15), through which He (Jesus) now speaks unto us in these last days (Heb. 1:1-2).

Following His death, and just before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave his “marching orders” to His chosen apostles, Jesus summed up the Old Testament in these words – **“the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms,”** declaring **“all these things must be fulfilled”** (Luke 24:44), and that **“repentance and remissions of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem** (Luke 24:47). They were the ones who would first carry this gospel message, this would begin at Jerusalem and be carried to **“all nations,”** that this work would begin when they (the apostles) were **“endued with power from on high”** (Luke 24:49). Luke, who wrote the book of Luke, also wrote the book of Acts, and (time wise) Acts chapter one begins where Luke chapter 24 concludes). Hence, in Acts 1:8 we learn that they would receive **power** when they received the Holy Spirit, and in Acts chapter two we learn that they (the apostles) on **“the day of Pentecost”** were **“all filled with the Holy Spirit,”** and begin to speak with other tongues (languages) **“as the Spirit gave them utterance.”** On that day, **“the day of Pentecost,”** the gospel age began, and it will continue until Jesus returns. We do not live under the Patriarchal dispensation. We do not live under the Law of Moses. We live in the Gospel Age, the message which must be preached (Mark 16:15), and by which those who are obedient thereunto are saved (Rom. 1:16).

If all people would grasp these basic truths, we would not hear people say, “David used instruments of music, so, can’t we?” David lived under the law of Moses, the law under which animal sacrifices were offered. Nor would people who refuse to be baptized say, “what about the thief on the cross?” The thief lived in the final days of the Mosaic age before Jesus died, and before that law was fulfilled and taken out of the way.

More, much more, could be said by way of what is involved in **“rightly dividing the word of truth,”** but hopefully enough has been said to underscore the fact that it is imperative that we study to show ourselves approved unto God and that we diligently strive to **“rightly”** divide **“the word of truth.”** Consider ye well! ■