

Teaching Sound Doctrine

Study

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 11 Tim. 2:15.

There would not be a denomination on the face of the earth today if this injunction by Paul to Timothy had been closely followed. Division does riot have its origin in the Bible. It comes as a result of man's failure to accept, or to rightly divide the word of truth.

At least three important points in 11 Tim. 2:15 merit our attention. (1) Paul said "study". In contrast to his words, we find prevalent today an appalling ignorance of the Bible. It is reported that recently a school teacher asked a class the question: "What is an epistle?" Hesitantly a boy raised his hand. "I'm not sure," he faltered, "but isn't an epistle the wife of an apostle?" This illustrates a growing condition in our society, and, we fear, even in the church. What is the solution? Paul's words hold the answer "study." (2) The object of our study is clearly pointed out by Paul. It is "the word of truth." Besides God's inspired word all other books pale into insignificance. Undue study of profane writings will tend to produce the "profane and vain babblings" which Paul warns against in the next verse. II Tim. 2:16. God's word must be the object of our finest mental efforts -- our most reverent, prayerful attitude. (3) Paul's words suggest the right method of Bible study, "rightly dividing the word of truth" or "handling aright the word of truth" (R.V.). In the original language the thought is, literally, "cutting straight." From this we see that the Christian's study is to be accurate and concise as a result of proper handling of God's word. The use of this method will result in an ability to see the truth clearly, and to present it with an exactness which cannot be gainsaid.

Now this question: how does one rightly divide the Bible? To rightly divide the scriptures one needs to understand that there are three periods of time

recorded in God's word. The first period, called the patriarchal dispensation, began with Adam and extended through Exodus 19. During this period God dealt with each family separately through the father, the head of the family, who would act as a mediator between the Lord and that particular family.

The second period, called the Mosaic dispensation, began with the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 20) and it continued until Christ died on the cross. During this time the priesthood was changed from the head of the family to the house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi. There was too, of course, a change of law. God gave that law through Moses for the purpose of governing his chosen people, the Israelites. The law had as its purpose, also, the bringing of the people to Christ. In other words, it served as a preparatory step in God's great scheme for human redemption. Gal. 3:24.

When Christ died, the purpose of Moses' law was fulfilled and, therefore, it was abolished or taken out of the way. Col. 2:13, 17; Rom. 7:1-6; Heb. 8:13. Despite the fact that God's word is crystal clear on this point, one of the most frequent mistakes made today is the failure to recognize the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. If all men understood that the old law has been annulled, we would never hear questions like these: "David used mechanical instruments of music, so why can't we?" or "What about the thief on the cross-can't I be saved like he was?" Either of these questions (and many similar ones) can be answered very simply. Both David and the thief lived on the side of the cross-we live on the other. When they were alive, Christ's law was not in effect. Heb. 9:16, 17. Today his law is in effect. We, then, must adhere strictly to the last will and testament of Christ in all matters of faith and practice. What would your attitude be toward the man who endeavored to thwart, alter, or in any way tamper with the will of a deceased friend? Such action is repelling to right-thinking people and yet that is the very thing some are trying to do to that greatest of all wills-the New Testament. The Old Testament merits our careful study (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11), but when we look to it today as authority and seek to justify ourselves by it, we thereby fall from God's favor. Gal. 5:4.

The Saviour's death on the cross ushered in a new period of time, the one in

which you and I are now living. The governing law for this period is, of course, the will of Christ. If we are to understand this spiritual law it is imperative that we rightly divide our New Testament.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are divided into four natural divisions. They are: (1) Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; (2) Acts (3) The letters written to Christians, Romans through Jude and (4) Revelation.

Matthew through John, the first division, contains the life of Christ. This section was written mainly to convince men that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy. John 20:30, 31. If every infidel would read and study these four books, there would be a great reduction in their number. These books contain ample evidence to move thoughtful men to believe in the divinity of Jesus. We, as we study these books, need to understand that they describe a period prior to the establishment of the New Testament church. For that reason we find that Christ worshipped on the sabbath and kept the other aspects of the law since that law was in force until he died. But do not forget this: whatever he spoke by way of difference from the old law was to be included in the gospel to be preached after his ascension. The second division of the New Testament is composed of only one book-Acts of the Apostles. Immediately after its first scenes we read about the establishment of the church. Acts 2. From then on through the book we have the early history of the newly-built church and we are made to see what men did in order to become members of that church. The book of Acts contains the blue-prints by which Christians are made. The one who is earnestly seeking an answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" must carefully study the book of Acts.

Twenty-one books, Romans through Jude, make up the next division of the New Testament. These letters of Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude are written to tell Christians how to live. Notice: just one book-the book of Acts -was written dealing specifically with how a man is saved from his alien sins. Twenty-one books are included in our New Testament to teach saints how to "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." How we need, in our teaching, to emphasize the essentiality of pure, zealous living on the part

of Christians!

In the final division of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, we catch a glimpse of the eternal city of God. In this book the aged apostle, John, from the Isle of Patmos, saw the heavens opened and viewed the things that the redeemed shall some day experience. As man reads this final book in God's word the mind begins to turn to the glorious possibilities of that future world, and hope grows brighter with reading as the reader receives a preview of that home of the soul, and the joy that shall never fade.

Near the close of the Bible's final book we find these words, "the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Rev. 20:12. When we stand in that great and crucial day to be weighed in the balance of God's eternal truth, how hopeless will be our eternity if, in life, we failed to study and rightly divide the word of the Lord! On the other hand, if we have studied, rightly divided, and applied God's word, how indescribable will be the joys that await us!