



Believer's Bible Study

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WE NEVER GUESS, WE LOOK IT UP!

These words appeared on a small button which my oldest son received many years ago. It was distributed as a promotional item by a leading encyclopedia company. The program encourages students to receive the correct answer by making use of their reference materials.

When introduced to their program I thought immediately of its spiritual application. How strong would the members of the Body of Christ be today if they would only “Look It Up!”

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

In any area of study it is easy to simply go on what one has heard, or on one's preconceived ideas or assumptions; but this is not the nature of a true student and researcher. God wants us to study the Scriptures for ourselves, so that we may know first-hand the facts of His Word. It is such a noble work to seek the truth for one's self. The Book of Acts tells us that this was the spirit of those whom Paul taught in the city of Berea.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17:11).

Dare to have such a noble spirit. Never guess, look it up!

WHAT ARE WE TO DO? “STUDY”

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

Each believer is to be a *student* of the Word. This is our calling. It is not enough to read books or hear teaching “about” the Bible. We each have a personal responsibility to *KNOW* the Scriptures *for ourselves*.

The “Bible School” is one from which we will never, during this earthly life, graduate.

It is often surprising to hear what some will affirm to be within the pages of the Bible. I have met, on a number of occasions, those who sincerely quote a supposed “Bible” passage that *no concordance could ever locate* (let alone those who quote passages completely out of their context!).

Many Christians are simply unacquainted with *The Authority* of their faith – The Bible. They are spiritually “illiterate.” They spend their Christian lives *guessing*; they never “*LOOK IT UP!*”

I often wonder if the pastor of the average church could not preach just about “anything” and the congregation would accept it, without question, as being the “gospel truth” (but the fact is that “anything” is actually being preached by many today!).

Why do so few believers study? Maybe one reason is that it is hard work!

... *And much study is a weariness of the flesh ...* (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

I once had a fellow believer tell me that they would rather do a hard day’s work than to study all day; that the manual labor was less tiring. The truth is that study is indeed very demanding. It requires much time and energy. This is true of any study; yet how much more the study of the Bible, but it is eternally rewarding!

Never guess, look it up!

WHY ARE WE TO STUDY? “TO SHOW THYSELF APPROVED”

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

We study the Scriptures because this is the only way that we can be the unashamed workman whom God can approve. The One who does the approving is not the organization, the institution, the denomination, the church, or pastor, but GOD Himself.

Our study is for Him! We are not studying for anyone else.

We seek only His approval! We are not preoccupied with what others think.

Those who will find their *approval* before men will find their own *shame* before the Father. Conversely, those who are *approved* unto God will find themselves *shamed* before the world.

Those who will be “*noble*” before God (Acts 17:11) will not find their popularity, respect, reputation, prestige, position, or honor before men.

Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day (I Corinthians 4:13).

Never guess, look it up!

HOW ARE WE TO STUDY? “RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD”

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

There is a divinely approved approach to the study of God’s Word, a certain way which we are to study the Scriptures: we are to *rightly divide* them.

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) articulated well the important principles of right division:

It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after.

The Bible *must* be divided and this is not *just* dividing that we see here, but *rightly* dividing. That is, we are to look for the many dividing marks of God which are in the Scripture. We must learn to make a difference where God Himself makes a difference!

Let us look at an example of *GOD making a difference*:

*If ye have heard of the **dispensation** of the **grace of God** which is given **me** to you-ward: How that by **revelation** He made known unto **me** the **mystery** (Ephesians 3:2-3).*

If one wants to be an approved workman he must begin by understanding what God’s program is for today. This can be known *only* through the ministry of Paul. The “*dispensation of the Grace of God*” was given to Paul for us. This dispensation was a “*mystery*” that was made known to Paul by divine “*revelation*.”

Clearly here God makes a distinction regarding Paul’s message, as He revealed that “*which was **kept secret since the world began***” (Romans 16:25). This is in contrast to Peter’s message which had been “***spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began***” (Acts 3:21). To make note of this distinction is to learn to make a difference where God makes a difference.

God makes a difference between the apostleship of Paul and Peter.

*For I speak to you **gentiles**, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the **gentiles**, I magnify mine office (Romans 11:13).*

... *The Gospel of the **uncircumcision** was committed unto **me** [Paul], as the Gospel of the **circumcision** was unto Peter (Galatians 2:7).*

Scofield made this comment concerning Paul's distinction:

In his writings *ALONE* we find the doctrine, position, walk and destiny of the church (Scofield Reference Bible page 1252).

William R. Newell also has said,

The failure or refusal to discern the Pauline Gospel as a separate and new revelation and not a "development from Judaism" accounts for two-thirds of the confusion in many people's minds today as regards just what the Gospel is ... You can judge any man's preaching or teaching by this rule – Is he Pauline? Does his doctrine *START* and *FINISH* according to those statements of Christian doctrine uttered by the Apostle Paul? (taken from *Paul's Gospel*).

Dear believer, let us not *guess* when it comes to the important question of God's Word, but let us take the time to "*LOOK IT UP!*" We will find *our* instructions as members of the Body of Christ in Paul's letters of Romans through Philemon.

We cannot just arbitrarily take truth from other dispensations and build an approved spiritual life. Remember the words of Paul in Romans 2:16:

*In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to **my gospel.***"

Never guess, look it up!

SECONDHAND "FAITH"

Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God (Romans 14:22).

Many, if not most of those in professing Christendom have secondhand "faith."

It can be a wonderful thing when others share *their* "faith" with us; but sadly much of what many believe was simply passed to them by others, untested and unproven. The only way for faith truly to be ours is for us to go to the Scriptures *themselves*, to be convinced by *them*.

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

Note carefully Paul's words, "*Study to show **thyself** ...*" and earlier, "*Hast thou faith? Have it to **thyself** before God.*"

God has called us into an individual faith before Himself. No one has the right to tell us what to believe, or to provide us with creeds or doctrinal statements. Our faith is to be personal, without constraint, without manipulation.

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand (II Corinthians 1:24).

The walk of faith truly begins with freedom from the bondage of religious dominion, and finds its completion standing alone before God by personal faith. Embrace this true liberty: freedom *from* religion, to freedom *of* faith – the freedom to follow your own heart of faith wherever God may lead.

Being strong in such personal faith is what brings glory to the Father.

*He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was **strong in faith**, giving glory to God* (Romans 4:20).

Do not settle for secondhand “faith,” for that is not truly faith at all – or at least it is not faith in God and in His Word – it is merely faith in men and their words. We must not merely go on what we have heard, or on our preconceived notions and supposition. God desires us to have a faith all our own, so that we may know and believe first-hand what He has said; for faith is simply taking God at His Word.

Don’t be caught up in the mimicry of a secondhand “faith.” Dare to believe God and His Word for yourself!

THE DISPENSATIONS

*Whereof I Paul am made a minister, according to the **dispensation** of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God* (Colossians 1:25).

The study of the Bible cannot be by a hop-skip-and-jump method. One must “*rightly divide*” the Word of Truth in order to correctly understand God’s plan and purpose for the ages.

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

In Genesis 2:16-17 God commands Adam not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree; but why has God not commanded us to refrain from eating from a certain tree?

The answer is found in “*rightly dividing the word of truth.*”

In Genesis 1:29 God limits man to a vegetarian diet; then in Genesis 9:3 He allows man to eat “*every moving thing that liveth.*” Under the Law of Moses certain animals were once again forbidden as “*unclean;*” but under the *dispensation* of Grace, God once again allows

“every creature of God” (I Timothy 4:3-5) to be eaten. All of this is understood only by “rightly dividing” the Word of Truth.

Under the Mosaic Law, God commanded the observance of “*holy days*” and “*sabbaths*,” yet in Galatians 4:10 Paul condemns the observance of days. The only answer to these apparent contradictions is the *right division* of the Word of Truth.

Without the proper, God-ordained divisions in Scripture, one will end up confused and in error. What is true in one age is not necessarily true in another (note the words “**present truth**” as found in II Peter 1:12).

The Scriptures are the revelation from God of Himself, as well as His plan and purpose for the ages. They were given to us in “*sundry times and in divers manners*” (Hebrews 1:1) over a period of 1600 years, consisting of 66 separate books written by about 40 authors, including kings, priests, prophets, herdsmen, fishermen, a tax collector, a physician, etc.

Some who are blind to *right division* while reading through the Bible scream “contradiction,” while others misapply the Scriptures.

A farmer sets certain tasks for his household in the winter, others in the spring and summer, and yet still other tasks in the fall. Would we consider him to be inconsistent by these changes? Why, no; he is only consistently following the proper rules and plan of agriculture. So it is with God.

To rightly divide the Scriptures there are some essential divisions that must be made (everybody divides the Bible, even if it is only between the “Old” and “New” Testaments). One of the most important divisions is the *dispensational* one.

DISPENSATION: ITS MEANING, AFFECT, DISTRIBUTION AND IMPORTANCE

*If ye have heard of the **dispensation** of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward* (Ephesians 3:2).

The word used to translate “*dispensation*” is *oikonomia*; Paul uses this word four times in his epistles. Surprisingly many believers are completely unaware of its meaning and importance. It has been a long *neglected* subject by the *majority* of Bible students. Just what is a “dispensation?”

What Is the Meaning of the Word “Dispensation”?

The word dispensation has to do with the act of distribution, or dealing out; it is a divine administration, economy, or stewardship. Dispensation comes from the word *dispense*. It can be seen in the word *dispensary*.

A dispensation is not, as is commonly believed, a period of time. W.C. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* gives the following definition:

A dispensation is not a period or epoch (a common, but erroneous use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement, or administration of affairs.

How Do Dispensations Affect Me?

Throughout the Bible God has had different administrations (or dispensations). In God's dispensations, as with that of the farmer, it is very important to do the work of the present season. For example, there are truths that belong to Israel that DO NOT belong to the Body of Christ. II Timothy 2:15 plainly gives us the answer:

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

Many try to follow the dispensations of the Hebrew Scriptures (Romans 15:4) or of Christ's earthly ministry (Romans 15:8); but Paul was given the dispensation *for us* (Colossians 1:25-26, Ephesians 3:2-3, Romans 15:15-16, 16:25-26).

What Does This Present Dispensation "Dispense"?

*... The dispensation of the **grace of God** ...* (Ephesians 3:2).

The dispensation given to Paul for us today was one of God's grace. This is the key to God's progressive revelation regarding Himself and His plan of the ages. It is so important for the student of the Scriptures to recognize this wonderful truth. God's present and pinnacle purpose is one of grace. He is dispensing, or dealing out His grace. We live in God's *grace dispensary*. The Father's sole mode of dealing is in grace.

What Is the Importance of Understanding the Dispensations?

And if a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully (II Timothy 2:5).

A participant in any race must follow the rules for *that* game or they will not win the prize. How sad it is that many believers, even though they are very sincere, won't be "*approved unto God*" as regarding their service and conduct of life because they did not *study* with the purpose to "**rightly divide the Word of Truth.**" They have not become a part of God's present purpose – of being a dispensary of the Father's grace. They neither live in grace themselves, nor with others.

God did not give Paul the administering of a stewardship of grace so that we could simply make "dispensational charts;" but so that we would be receptors and channels of "*the riches of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7).

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, **is this grace given**, that I should preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ** (Ephesians 3:8).

If ye have heard of the **dispensation of the grace of God** which is given me to you-ward (Ephesians 3:2).

THE SOURCE AND IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH

Sanctify them through thy truth: **thy Word is truth** (John 17:17).

Webster defines truth as “conformity to fact.” By way of example, the government has a record of my birth. My birth is a matter of fact. Now, if I should state my age inconsistently with the record, *i.e.*, without *conformity* to the facts, it would *not be truth*, even if I sincerely believed it to be so. It has been said that facts are stubborn things. It must also be realized that truth is simply conformity to those facts.

The Source of Truth

Truth is obtained from God (John 14:6). God’s truth is established by the *facts* of His Word (Isaiah 8:20). God’s Word is often called “*The Word of Truth*” (Psalm 119:43; II Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 1:13; James 1:18), and in II Timothy 2:15 Paul tells us that we must search diligently to discover the facts of the Bible.

God does not always present the same facts for every dispensation. Things that are “true” about the summer are not necessarily “true” about the winter. This is why Peter spoke of “*present truth*” (II Peter 1:12). The simple fact is that God’s Word is “*the Word of Truth*” and it must be “*rightly divided*.”

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

The Importance of Truth

Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6).

The issue with God is truth. It is what God is looking for in man. He desires “*truth in the inward parts*.”

In Jeremiah 5:1 Judah faces invasion and *one* man, which sought truth, would have been sufficient for God to have pardoned and preserved the entire nation. We thus see the importance of “*one man*” seeking truth (Ezekiel 22:30).

Anyone who would suggest that right division is of no importance is either ignorant of the truth, or has no love of the truth – nor of the “*the Word of Truth*.”

THE FREEDOM OF TRUTH

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

Truth liberates, while error enslaves; and the bondage that comes from error is far more binding than that of a physical prison.

The entire world around us lies in the deep bondage of error. They are,

*Ever learning, and never able to come to the **knowledge of the truth** (II Timothy 3:7).*

Theirs are,

*Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and **destitute of the truth** (I Timothy 6:5a).*

Truth has never been popular. The masses have never possessed it and its freedom. One of Israel's sins was that truth had fallen in the streets (Isaiah 59:14). Strangely, the truth will also make enemies:

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? (Galatians 4:16).

Some “*receive not the love of **the truth**” (II Thessalonians 2:10), and will “not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from **the truth**, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Timothy 4:3-4).*

Oh, that we may pray with David of years ago,

*Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me **in Thy truth**, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day (Psalm 25:4-5).*

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