

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH



TO UNDERSTAND THE Bible better we need to first rightly divide it: “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). Rightly dividing God’s word is to handle it accurately. This means to correctly decipher what Scripture is saying by applying appropriate literary principles to the segment being studied. It enables us to comprehend more of what any book, chapter, passage, or verse is saying to us. It also helps us avoid the misunderstandings, snares, entanglements, and life-encumbering deceits created by man’s traditional exposition of Scripture. In other words, it provides the means for us to see unobstructed by human tradition.

Tradition: “The delivery of opinions, doctrines, practices, rites and customs from father to son, or from ancestors to posterity... That which is handed down from age to age by oral communication” (1).

Most traditions have become postulates commonly accepted without question by many Christians. Many of these traditions will actually cause people to sin: “But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3). Many of these deceitful human traditions hinder Christians from having a more glorifying walk with the Lord, which is the Christian’s purpose on earth: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do

all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). One of the greatest weapons God allows Satan to wield during his tenure on earth is that of deceit, and some of his grandest uses of deceit come through his establishment of human tradition. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and *vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*” (Col. 2:8, emphasis added).

SIN AND THE SIN NATURE

The first thing we need to understand is what sin actually is and how it is related to the sin nature. Sin is the transgression of God’s Word, and it is opposed to God and His ways.

Evil and Sin

Sins are biblically evil acts, evil thoughts, or just plain evil. Sin and evil are very closely related. Many times “evil” is used as an adjective to an action (i.e., “evil action” or “evil thought”), to make it a sin. When “evil” is used as an adjective to a thought, it may or may not be sin as will be seen as the discussion proceeds. When “evil” is used as a noun, it is sin in and of itself. How did evil come about? *Evil* is either sin or an influence to produce sin. God is the Creator of all things. Nothing exists unless it was created. The Bible says that, just as everything else was created, God also created evil. “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, *and create evil: I the Lord do all these things*” (Isa. 45:7, emphasis added).

Scripture is very clear that God does not actually do evil and neither does He tempt anyone to do evil. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*” (James 1:13, emphasis added). And whereas God cannot be tempted with evil, we see that Jesus, in His humanity, was: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but *was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb. 4:14, 15, emphasis added). Jesus the Christ, in his divinity, was not and could not be tempted. Jesus in his humanity *was in all points tempted like as we are*.

But at the same time, Isaiah 45:7 says God created evil: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” This almost seems contradictory—until we understand the essence of evil. There is good and evil. When I say “good” here, I am speaking of true biblical good, or God’s design and way, not necessarily what we would call “good” humanly speaking; that may indeed be against God’s way as we see in Matthew 16:21-23 (to be discussed later). Since good is doing things according to God’s ways, evil would be the antithesis of that, which would be going against God’s ways. But since God created the universe and all that is in it, why would anything not go according to His ways? It is because He also created beings with the capacity to resist His ways; free moral agents who are able to choose whether to follow God in His sovereignty. When God created evil, it meant He created the ability to choose against Him. By creating beings with the ability to make independent free choices, God also created any evil emanating from them. The ability to choose is not in-and-of-itself good or evil. It is, however, the springboard from which good and evil come. Evil ways and sins are simply the choice to go against God and His ways. It is the reason Lucifer and his angels fell. They had the ability to follow God or to resist Him. When they chose to oppose Him, it was, by definition, evil.

Being created with this ability to choose is also how Adam and Eve sinned even though they originally had no sin nature. To sin is to do something that is not right, something against God and His righteousness. This will normally happen through choice, even though it may be by means of ignorance or deception. At first, Adam and Eve didn’t even know what evil was. This is implied by God’s Word after the Fall: “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is *become* as one of us, *to know good and evil*” (Gen. 3:22, emphasis added).

Choice and Love

It is this very ability to choose that not only enables evil, sin, and hatred, but also spiritual good, righteousness, and love (again, I mean good, righteousness, and love that is godly vs. good, righteousness, and love “humanly speaking”). As already stated, by creating the ability to choose, God created evil. But the original reason for creating the ability

to choose was not for the capability of evil but for the capacity to love. To be legitimate, the choice for man to love had to include man's choice not to love. God is love (1 John 4:8) and God makes choices (see 1 Chron. 28:4; Ezek. 20:5). God made humanity after His own image (Gen. 1:27), and this included the ability to love and to make choices: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, *choose* you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15, emphasis added). Love and, its antithesis, evil exist only because God created the ability to choose.

Sin Nature

When Adam and Eve fell in the garden by choosing to sin, they also received a cursed condition. This cursed condition included the indwelling of the sin nature. Adam was created first and was set up as head of the ensuing family. So it was when Adam initially sinned that the sin nature came upon humanity (cf. Gen. 3:6, 7). Since that time, the sin nature has been passed through, and to, all people through the male side of mankind. The sin nature is the "natural" propensity to sin. It is why people will commonly use the expression "Well, I'm only human!" or "It was only natural to do that" when they give in to some temptation. This natural tendency to sin is due to the sin nature being the conduit through which the evil domain of Satan is able to speak and persuade people.¹ It is through this evil influence and communication that Satan (and/or any of his entire evil empire) tempts men and women to carry their natural desires to harmful and sinful levels. Thus, coming out of these desires will be the multitude of troubles caused by excess in eating, pleasure, desire for money, desire for power or glory, sex, and so on. It is why people will say, "The Devil made me do it." Some people will even claim they have continual voices in their minds that are tormenting them and telling them to do evil things. This would be Satan (i.e., Satan and/or any of his regime) communicating to them through their sin nature.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians gives us insight as to how this works. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the *course of this world*, according to *the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2, emphasis added). To explain this verse, I will use the analogy of a radio. We cannot see radio waves, but just because we can't see them does not mean they do not exist.

We know they exist because, through a receiver, we can hear what is being transmitted through the air by these invisible waves. Likewise, the sin nature² is our “receiver” for the sent messages of Satan since he is *the prince of the power of the air*. God allows Satan to put evil thoughts and persuasions into our minds (see Chapter three, *God’s Sovereignty: Thoughts and Spirits*). These bad thoughts and temptations are not sins by themselves, for we cannot help that God allows them to come into our minds. They only become sins if we do not choose to handle them properly. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own *lust*, and *enticed*. Then when lust hath *conceived*, it bringeth forth sin” (James 1:14, 15, emphasis added). The *lust*³ is one of our own desires. The *enticed* is usually caused by the persuasion by Satan. The *conceived* would be to allow the temptation to seize us and take control of us. We are to choose not to let this happen. That is why the Bible’s admonishes the “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and *bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10:5, emphasis added).

Many of the problems people experience are of a spiritual nature.⁴ This means they are acting according to the communication received from Satan’s supernatural realm. A spiritual problem does not only come from the reception of communication from Satan’s dominion, for that happens to everyone constantly, but it comes from responding to the communication accordingly. It is deceptive because a person normally does not recognize when he is being influenced. Most people are not aware that this even happens, let alone on a continual basis. That being the case, when thoughts from Satan come into their mind they are many times assumed to be of their own making. Once a person assumes ownership of these thoughts, he is more likely to respond in accord with them (Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33). Fortunately, to stem runaway sin, God put a conscience in every person (Rom. 2:15) to keep the effects of this influence under control. Nevertheless, since those thoughts are coming from Satan, any corresponding response is in error and will produce problems, whether immediate or in the future. It is the reason the Bible exhorts believers about “*bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10:5, emphasis added). The Bible speaks of the temporal spiritual state of a believer at any given moment as

being based on what spiritual influence, God's or Satan's, he is allowing himself to follow.⁵

And so it is that all people, whether believers or unbelievers, “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” (Eph.6:12, emphasis added). Satan works through them and their opposition at the same time. His biggest weapon in conflicts between people is his deceit because of the common condition that neither side realizes they are being used by him as he silently and destructively agitates through their respective sin natures. The apostle Paul was well aware of these schemes of Satan as he encourages us to forgive those who might have wronged us: “Lest Satan *should get an advantage of us*: for we are not ignorant of his *devices*” (2 Cor. 2:11, emphases added). Through the sin nature, Satan will instigate troubles and wickedness between people. But at the same time he is also initiating internal problems within the individual himself, including doubts, fears, the pursuance of lusts, and so on.

If the above is true, it would logically follow that Satan could not communicate telepathically to anyone who did not have a sin nature. Scripture supports this. Originally, how did Satan first speak to Eve when neither she nor Adam had the sin nature? He came to her physically as the serpent and spoke to her: “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen. 3:1). Satan then effectually spoke to Adam through Eve. Another example would be Jesus. Since He did not have a human father, He also did not have a sin nature. So for Satan to speak to Jesus, he had to do it through means other than by putting thoughts into His mind. Thus we find when Jesus was tempted, it was either directly by Satan (see Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13), or indirectly, as Satan spoke through people—saved (see Mark 8:31-33) and unsaved. We see how Satan continually tempted Jesus through the scribes and Pharisees. As Jesus said to them: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44).

Understanding sin and how it is related to the sin nature is an important foundational element in handling accurately God's Word.

WHO IS SCRIPTURE SPEAKING TO?

One of the most important and basic elements of rightly dividing is determining exactly who a particular text of Scripture is speaking to. An example is Ephesians 5:22, where we find the command, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” Unfortunately, many husbands apply this verse as though it says “Husbands *make* your wives submit to you.” But this verse of the Bible is not speaking to the husband; it is directed to the wife. The husband’s instruction is to love his wife the way Christ loved the church: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (5:25). Think of the sorrow and heartache that would be avoided if all married Christians applied this passage rightly divided.

Which Set of People?

Any book or chapter of a book in Scripture may address more than one set of people. As an example, Paul wrote to members of the body of Christ. Yet in some parts of his writings he would also address the unbelievers he knew to be present in the assembly. We need to first recognize that he does address unbelievers, and then we need to discern when he was directing his message to them. A perfect example of this would be 2 Corinthians 5:20: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” The first part of this verse is obviously referring to believers, but the second part of the verse is just as clearly speaking to unbelievers. This means there were also non-Christians in that assembly. Part of the verse was appealing to these people to come to Christ. It is a basic error to not consider that there was a mixture of saved and unsaved people in the various church gatherings addressed by the writers of Scripture. The false assumption made by many people today is that since the letters were written to organized assemblies of believers that there were no unbelievers in these groups. In a perfect world, that might be the case. But the world was no more perfect at that time than it is now. There were mixtures of believers and unbelievers in the original church gatherings just as there are today. So many of the New Testament books of the Bible address both believers (primarily) and unbelievers (secondarily). Due to this mixture,

there are passages in Scripture that can be very confusing, to the point of appearing to make no sense, unless they are rightly divided to know when Christ's followers were being addressed and when non-Christians were being spoken to. Later we will see how important this is in resolving some of the problem passages in Scripture.

Which Church?

Subgroups also exist even within the two basic groups of saved and unsaved people. We need to be able to distinguish between these subsets. When reading the Bible about saved people—what is expected of them, where they are going, how they are going—we want to know which biblical dispensation (see Eph. 3:2) these saved people are from. On many things, people normally will make what they think are true assumptions based on traditional teaching. As an example, traditional teaching assumes the same group of people for the word “church” whenever it is used in Scripture. But contrary to tradition, every time the word church is used in the New Testament, it does not necessarily refer to the same group of people each time. There is a group of people referred to as “the church, the body of Christ” under the dispensation of grace. And then there is another group referred to as the “church” under the dispensation of law or “kingdom program.” These are two very distinct New Testament organizations in God's overall program. Under the tradition of men, these two different church entities are spoken of interchangeably and without distinction. As will be demonstrated, this is contrary to Scripture. We will also find a group of people who will enter into heaven even though they will not enter due to the normal salvation event. They were never “saved,” at least as we understand the term (as we will see in Chapter six, *Day of Accountability*).

Which Unsaved People?

There are also different groups of unsaved people. There are unsaved people who have not yet been called to salvation by God, as well as unsaved people who were already called. Who are they and what distinguishes them from each other? How can we tell when the Bible is speaking to one group and not the other? By rightly dividing Scripture,

we are able to determine which group of unbelievers is being referenced in a given verse or passage.

The Grace Program

Let us examine one of the groups listed above, the group of currently saved people living today. Many believe that virtually the entire Bible is directed to Christians. It is true that all of God's word is **for** us: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). And yet all of God's word is not always **to** Christians. There are many universal principles throughout the Bible that Christians should learn and apply. Proverbs, for example, has multitudes of them. At the same time, we are not to set up altars to offer God sacrifices of bulls and goats as instructed in the book of Leviticus. In acknowledging this, we have rightly divided the Word of Truth by discerning to not practice that which does not apply to us. And so it is important to realize there are two distinct dispensations operating in the New Testament, one of law and the other of grace.

Dispensations

A *dispensation* would be the system of principles and rites employed in God's program for His people in any given biblical age. Many theologians believe there are anywhere from seven to ten dispensations in the Bible. The two main dispensation programs spoken of in the New Testament are the *dispensation of law* and the *dispensation of grace*. The dispensation of law, with its sacrificial offerings, foreshadowed Jesus Christ becoming the perfect sacrificial offering for us (Heb. 10). When we have that insight, we are able to develop a deeper appreciation of the dispensation of grace, which is the age we live in now. The revelation of this was first given to the apostle Paul: "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; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which *in other ages was not made known* unto the sons of men, ***as it is now revealed*** unto his holy apostles and prophets

by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be *fellowheirs*, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:2-6, emphasis added).

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as any of the other New Testament books not written by Paul’s persuasion, were written under the dispensation of law (also known as the prophecy or kingdom program). These books are not directed to believers in our day and age. Even Jesus Himself claimed not to be sent to the Gentiles. This is shown very clearly in a statement he made to the Canaanite woman who came to him pleading for her daughters’ healing (Matt. 15:21-28). We see in His response that He (and therefore His apostles) was not addressing the Gentiles: “But he answered and said, I am not sent *but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matt. 15:24, emphasis added). Another example is found at the beginning of the book of James: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, *to the twelve tribes* which are scattered abroad, greeting” (James 1:1, emphasis added). In the kingdom program, the people of Israel were God’s chosen people and they were to proselytize the Gentiles. Even the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem will be named after the twelve tribes (Rev. 21:12). And the twelve foundation stones will be named after the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14).

In the dispensation of grace, by contrast, we see there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles saved in this dispensation. “For there *is no difference* between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Rom. 10:12, emphasis added; cf. Col. 3:11).

The idea of Paul’s writings being directed to the believers in this age (the church, the body of Christ) has been conveniently labeled⁶ by many traditional expositors today as “hyperdispensationalism,” a word suggesting an erroneous extreme. We live in the dispensation of grace. That being the case, the Apostle Paul’s epistles are written directly to us. Paul is the only apostle to write specifically to the dispensation of grace (see Eph. 3:2; cf. Col. 1:25, 26), and thus the church, the body of Christ. “So we, being many, are *one body in Christ*, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:5, emphasis added). “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the *body of Christ*”

(Eph. 4:12, emphasis added; see also Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 12:12-18, 27; Eph. 3:6, 5:23). In the Apostle's letter addressed to the Galatians, we see the stewardship of the grace dispensation (referred also as *the gospel of the uncircumcision*) was given to Paul, just as the gospel of the kingdom program (referred to as *the gospel of the circumcision*) had been given to Peter and his fellow apostles. "But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7-9).

A Mystery

The grace dispensation has been ongoing for almost two millennia, but many people have never been educated about it.⁷ This program was a mystery never before prophesied about in Scripture. "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to *my* gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of *the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began*" (Rom. 16:25, emphasis added; see also Eph. 3:3-5, 9; Col. 1:26, 27). This is why "the church, the body of Christ" did not start at Pentecost. The believers spoken of in the second chapter of Acts are in the "kingdom church program." As Peter said to the mockers, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). What was happening at Pentecost was prophesied in the past (Joel 2:28-32), but as we just saw, Paul said that the *grace program*, which was a *mystery revealed*, was not prophesied in ages past. Also, note that part of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:17, 18; Joel 2:28, 29) was in the process of being fulfilled at Pentecost, but the next two verses (Acts 2:19, 20; Joel 2:30, 31) refer to the *tribulation period*. Since the dispensation program of grace was not prophesied, it never appears in Joel's prophecy. It is as if there has been a two thousand year pause in the *kingdom program* (because it will begin again in the soon-to-come tribulation period). Joel, Daniel (see Dan. 9:26, 27), and all the other

Old Testament prophets, were unaware of the dispensation of grace. Contrary to traditional teaching, the church as we know it today did not start in Acts 2. The Lord used the apostle Paul to introduce the grace program and start “the church, the body of Christ.” However, as we see in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, Paul encourages us to understand and employ all of God’s principles that would apply to us, regardless of what portion of Scripture it originates from. “**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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (emphasis added).

There are many timeless and universal principles throughout the Bible. But the program of God’s grace, “the mystery,” as introduced and taught in Paul’s writings, teaches us that the law spoken of in the previous dispensation does not apply to our dispensation of grace in the same manner. “For sin (i.e., the sin nature) shall not have dominion over you: for *ye are not under the law, but under grace*” (Rom. 6:14, emphasis added). It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to realize this element of the grace program. And contrary to the condemnation of many skeptics regarding the grace vs. law position (how the teaching of grace “eliminates and denies the law”), living by grace actually fulfills the law. The very next verse, Romans 6:15, says: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid.” Let’s examine why this is so.

Christ Living Through Us

A major part of God’s grace program is Jesus Christ living in and through us via our “new creature.” “Therefore if any man be in Christ, *he is a new creature*: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, emphasis added). The new creature is also referred to as the “new man” in Paul’s letters to the Ephesians (4:24) and Colossians (3:10). In our daily walk we are in the new creature, or new man, whenever our soul is clothed by, and therefore walking directly under, the influence of the Spirit of God. The new man is permanent since it is what will be the saved person’s eternal state when they go to heaven. The new man is in contradistinction

to the “old man,” which is the soul clothed with the sin nature and under its influence (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). For believers, the old man has become temporal. The sin nature will be permanently discarded either at death or at the rapture of the church. “We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and *the dead shall be raised incorruptible*, and *we shall be changed*. For *this corruptible must put on incorruption*, and *this mortal must put on immortality*. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:51-54, emphasis added). The eternal state will leave the Christian’s soul only to be clothed in the Spirit with a new body, and they will thus live eternally as their new man.

Note the common denominator in the new man and the old man is the soul. The soul is that part of a person which makes choices in life. The soul is so closely related to the influence put upon by the spirit, that it is hard to distinguish between the two (cf. Heb. 4:12). Since we are made in the image of God, we see that He also has a soul, and that it too makes choices (Lev. 26:11, 30). The choices made by someone depend greatly upon either the influence of God through the Spirit, or the influence of Satan through the sin nature. That is why God exhorts us (our soul) to choose to put ourselves under His influence by putting off the old man and putting on the new. “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24). Whenever we are not in the new man, we are by default in the old man. This is because our soul has residence in this corrupted body or flesh wherein the sin nature dwells (see Rom. 7:14-23). So these verses tell us to continually seek being under the influence of the Spirit dwelling in us, which is to be “in the Spirit.”

The only choice a soul can make while under the influence of the sin nature is to do sin. On the other hand, the only time someone would not be sinning, is when he, who has received salvation from God, is in

the new man and therefore in the Spirit. God gives us the ability to be “in the Spirit” by choice because we are His saved children. We see this when Paul writes, “Knowing this, that our old man is *crucified* with him, that the *body of sin might be destroyed*, that henceforth *we should not serve sin*” (Rom. 6:6, emphasis added). The word *crucified* is the Greek word (Strong’s #4957) “Sustauróo: . . . ***spiritually by mortifying our worldly and fleshly lusts*** by the cross of Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). In Rom. 6:6 so that *sin* (i.e., the sin nature) *cannot have preeminence in a believer’s life*” (2). Before salvation, we were always in the old man. But because of believing in Christ, our old man is now subdued that “our body of sin might be destroyed.” The old man is now rendered without effect and we should not (indicating again the use of choice) serve sin or be in subjection or bondage to it. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col. 2:6). This has never been available to anyone else in any other dispensation.

The only way true godly love is carried out through us is by God living through us. Being part of the body of Jesus Christ is an incredible privilege we enjoy as new creatures in Christ. This is what the apostle Paul meant by: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that *ye present your bodies* a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1, emphasis added). This verse implores us to continually choose to put on the new man (like Eph. 4:24) and let Christ live through our body. Put another way, this is how we can walk by grace—by choosing to be in the Spirit.

“For we know that *the law is spiritual*” (Rom. 7:14, emphasis added). How often have we read over this verse and just continued on, missing the very important spiritual truth contained there? The only way God’s law can really be fulfilled by anyone, physically and spiritually, is by God doing it through him. That would mean that anyone not saved could not truly carry out the law, not even for a moment. An individual who has been saved is the only one able to carry out the law as God purposed, and that only when the person is in the Spirit. “For sin (the sin nature) shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14, emphasis added). A Christian is freed from having to attempt following the law through the old self or flesh. Instead, by being under God’s grace, they are now able to choose to let

the new man, under the direction of the Spirit of God, perform true righteousness through them (Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 4:22-24).

Hebrews 10:1 tells us: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.” That is why John the Baptist proclaimed “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Here he was prophesying Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice in fulfillment of the law. Christ then became our substitute, and now He produces scriptural righteousness through us: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6).

Grace and Faith

The fact that we made a choice for Christ is not to be confused with works: “That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. *By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.* Therefore we conclude that a man *is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*” (Rom. 3:26-28, emphasis added). The *law of faith* implies making the choice to substitute Christ’s perfect faith (see chapter 4, *Day of Salvation: The Faith*), for our imperfect, worldly faith. “Knowing that a *man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ*, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by *the faith of Christ*, and *not by the works of the law*: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16, emphasis added). We then are to live by this faith of Christ. As believers, whenever we are in the Spirit and Jesus Christ is living through our bodies, it is literally the faith of Christ that is working through us. “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh *I live by the faith of the son of God*, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, emphasis added). So the believer is able to do true

godly righteousness by choice, as he opts to have the faith of Christ live through him by being in the Spirit.

A believer will also go into the Spirit when God, through His sovereignty, puts the person in the Spirit. An example of this can be seen in the gospel of Mark. “But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for *it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost* (Mark 13:11, emphasis added; see Matt. 10:19, 20; Luke 21:12-15).

Counterfeit

Something counterfeit is intended to look like the real thing, but is not real. A counterfeit can take on the *appearance* of good. Now Scripture tells Christians to “Abstain from all *appearance* of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22, emphasis added). Certainly God wants us to avoid doing evil, but we are warned to not even have the *appearance* of evil. This would imply that whereas what we actually do in a given circumstance is not evil, to the unknowing it is evil because to them it looks sinful (1 Cor. 8:4-9).

Conversely, evil would lead us to the opposite situation. Since Scripture tells God’s people not to have even the *appearance of evil*, it is not surprising that Satan will have people under his influence try to have the *appearance of good*. Whenever someone is in the flesh, it is very common that they will take on an appearance of good. This would mean that even though it may appear to look good, it actually is not good because it is done under the influence of Satan. Since Satan has a nature that is directly the opposite of God’s nature, he will lead those under his influence to do only evil. But because he is a master of deceit, and working through human pride, he will encourage the appearance of good while performing deeds with ulterior motives. So even though the action or word spoken may seem good, it is deceptive because its intent is not to glorify God, which means it is sin.

This spiritual tendency not only holds true for nonbelievers, it also holds true for any believer when he is in the flesh and doing something *according* to his sin nature. It is why Isaiah says “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Anything we do under our own natural

power, which is under the influence of the sin nature, is sin. It makes no difference how good it looks or even how good, humanly speaking, it actually is. The fact is that, no matter what the human purpose might be, when anything is done under the direction of Satan, the *motive* is not to glorify God. Anything done outside the motive of glorifying God is “missing the mark,” which is sin. Satan does and will work his plans through unknowing people, whether saved (See Ch 6 *Day of Accountability: Daily Spiritual Walk* to see an example between Jesus and Simon Peter) or unsaved, as he communicates and prompts them to action through their sin nature.

This holds true in the general flow of life. There are times, however, where Satan uses this *appearance of good* in a more spiritually dangerous way. There are people who profess to be Christians and even seem to know the Bible quite well, but at the same time they teach heresy with the purpose to mislead Christians. Scripture addresses this very issue: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:13-15). These counterfeit Christians, or false teachers, have the purpose of misleading Christians in an attempt to derail their usefulness to God. Counterfeit false teachers have existed throughout the ages and will continue to operate until Christ returns at His second advent. Their methods do not change. They teach false doctrine and encourage greed and sensuality. The second chapter of 2 Peter directly addresses these kinds of people.

Paul again warned about the counterfeits that invaded the church in Galatia proclaiming the kingdom program in Galatians 3:1-14 and 5:1-12. These men were preaching the works and circumcision of the kingdom program to the point that Paul even wished they would castrate themselves (Gal. 5:12). The important thing to understand about counterfeits is they look like the real thing. The Bible often compares dangerous false teaching to leaven. There may be a lot of “truth”⁸ in the teaching, but it is used as bait to conceal the poison, or leaven. It is why Jesus Christ continually warned about the leaven of the Pharisees (see Matt. 16:6, 11, 12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1).

Grace Conclusion

By definition, the “old man” in believers can never accomplish the biblical faith of Jesus Christ that is in them. As we saw earlier, the old man is our soul under the influence of the *sin nature*. When the soul makes choices and people do things under the direction of the sin nature, it is not done by faith and is therefore sin: “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Christ’s faith only emerges when we are in the Spirit with Christ living through us. When we are in the flesh, even as Christians, we will not take God for His Word, and may act like the natural man who is unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14).

It is when we are in our old man that we exercise fears and doubts. We have these fears only when we are in the spirit and influence of the sin nature. Contrast that with what the Bible says about the spirit of our new man: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). The Bible says the only time we can do anything scriptural and truly righteous is when we are in the Spirit and Christ is living through us. If we are not in the Spirit, we are in the flesh by default and can do nothing biblically righteous. Due to this default condition, Christians experience being in the flesh much more than being in the Spirit, a frustration Paul speaks of quite clearly in Romans 7:14-25.

Even so, Scripture shows that contrary to the accusation of how the teachings of living by grace “eliminates and denies the law,” living by grace, or “in the Spirit of God,” is actually the only way a person can obey the law both physically and spiritually.

PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

Important as it is to discern the audience Scripture is directed to, it is also significant to understand from what perspective the passage of Scripture is being spoken.

Within Time vs. Outside of Time

An example of this is in Ephesians 2:6: “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Has the Lord already raised believers in Christ up to heavenly places?

That is what the Scripture says. But those of us physically alive are still down here on earth. So how can this be? In cases such as this, we need to understand from what perspective a verse is being spoken. I am living down here on earth from the perspective of physical created time. On the other hand, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Col. 3:1). The perspective from which this verse is spoken is the spiritually eternal perspective. We are not physically seated at the right hand of God, but we are spiritually seated there since we are spiritually in Christ (see Rom 6:3 – “*baptized into Jesus Christ*” means placed into Jesus Christ and therefore identified with Him). Another way of putting this is to say the verse is speaking from the viewpoint which comes from outside of time.

We must understand that since God is also outside of His creation, which includes time, He many times will speak from that position of omniscience. Paul compares the viewpoint of inside of time to outside of time in 1 Corinthians 13. “For *now* (from inside of time) we see through a glass, darkly; but *then* (from outside of time) face to face: *now* I *know* in part; but *then* shall I *know* even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12, emphasis added). The first *know* is the Greek word *ginosko* (Greek Strong’s #1097), meaning a partial knowledge from here on earth. The second *know* is the Greek word *epiginosko* (Greek Strong’s #1921), which means the full knowledge that we will have when we are in our heavenly state outside of time. *Epiginosko* is the same word used for *known* at the end of the verse, which is speaking of God’s knowledge.

Whenever God’s omniscience is spoken of, it is His *epiginosko*, or full knowledge, of all things past, present, and future. When the Bible speaks of the *foreknowledge* of God (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2), it is referring to man’s inside of time perspective of God’s outside of time, omniscient, and omnipresent knowledge of the “future” (as there is no future from God’s eternal perspective).

It’s one thing to see a parade from street level. But one gets a completely different and more total outlook seeing the parade from the air. If needlework is looked at from the backside, it appears to be in complete disarray with no obvious rhyme or reason to it. But when the other side is looked at, in all its beauty and design, it can be seen that there indeed was a real reason for the apparent chaos on the opposite

side. This would be comparable to seeing life from inside of time versus outside of time.

With the eternal perspective in mind we can now understand why God rebuked Job as He did (Job 38-40:2). Although we still don't know what God's full purpose was in allowing Job to suffer what he did, we are able to perceive what some of His intent was. As God asked Job so many questions by presenting an overview of His creation, it becomes obvious that God thinks of everything—that He really does know what He's doing. Who is mortal man to question Him? In Job's case, the writing of the book of Job came out of his suffering and this has blessed countless millions of people throughout the years. God also demonstrated something about His children to Satan and all the angels (whether fallen or not). God also used this book to give us a synopsis of His creation. These are just a few reasons why God had inspired the writing of the book of Job. But let us not miss what may be most important point of all: God is in control of every little detail in His entire creation. He is outside of time and He is omniscient. So it should not surprise us that God would write portions of His Word from that perspective. We need to not only be aware of that, but we moreover need to discern when it is so written. There will be more discussion on the time continuum in chapter three.

Spiritual or Physical

We also want to rightly divide as to when the Bible is speaking from a spiritual vs. a physical viewpoint. As corporeal beings, we tend to look at much of Scripture as speaking on a physical and material basis when it is actually referring to the spiritual component of an issue. We will see this in more detail subsequently on a discussion of death and life.

PROPER USAGE OF WORDS

The Greek and Hebrew languages are in many ways larger and more complete languages than our own English. It therefore helps to know which Greek or Hebrew word is actually being used in the verse, rather than just what the translated English word is. For example, I was originally confused by the different uses of the English word “love” in

the New Testament until I discovered there were several different words in the Greek language being translated into the English word “love.” Scripture’s use of the word became so much clearer when I understood which Greek word, with proper meaning, was being translated into “love.” We just saw an example of this with the two Greek words, *ginosko* and *epiginosko*, being translated into the same English word *know* in 1 Corinthians 13:12. The first *know* indicates a partial earth-bound knowledge, whereas the second one speaks of God’s universal all-encompassing knowledge outside of time. Scripture becomes clearer when we understand the proper use of words.

Death

When death is being spoken of; which kind of death is being referred to? Generally speaking, death is separation. Physical death is separation of spirit and soul from the physical body, and spiritual death is the separation of spirit and soul from God. The Bible teaches that a person can be physically alive but spiritually dead. An example of physical life coinciding with spiritual death is found in the first book to Timothy, when Paul writes, “But she that liveth in pleasure *is dead while she liveth*” (1 Tim. 5:6, emphasis added). So when death is spoken of in a passage, it must be first determined if it is physical or spiritual death. This can usually be determined by the context of the passage.

Next, when spiritual death is being spoken of, is it a temporal or eternal death being referred to? Many people go through the temporal first spiritual death. And it is at the Great White Throne Judgment where pronouncement is made as to who will go through the next spiritual death known as the second death (see Rev. 20:11-15). We see the words *death* and *life* used in a spiritual sense in the first epistle of John: “We know that *we have passed from death unto life*, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother *abideth in death*” (1 John 3:14, emphasis added). Another example would be in the gospel of John: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed from death unto life*” (John 5:24, emphasis added). Not all examples are as obvious. In Romans 6:16 we find, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves

servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of *sin unto death*, or of *obedience unto righteousness*?” (emphasis added). The context of the passage (per verse 13) has Paul speaking to the Christian believers. Obviously they are physically alive, but the verse is addressing their spiritual life or death during their moment-by-moment walk as Christians. Since the recipients of the letter are Christians with a destiny of heaven, the *sin unto death* is not speaking of eternal damnation, such as 1 John 5:16 does (see Ch. 5 *DOS Supporting Scripture: 1 John 5:16*). It is instead indicating a spiritual separation from God at times during their daily walk in the course of this world. Since sin is disobedience to God, the opposite state is *obedience unto righteousness*, which is the same as obedience unto life or spiritual non-separation from God.

The two questions to ask when either the word *life* or the word *death* is encountered would be, “Is it physical or spiritual?” and “Is it temporal or eternal?”

If

A similar question arises with the word *if*. Which *if* is being used in a given verse? Is it “if and it is so” (Matt. 4:3), or is it “if and it is not so” (John 8:42), or is it a conditional “if – maybe, maybe not” (Acts 20:16)? All three are used in the Bible, giving quite different meanings to the verses using the conjunction *if*.

Which Definition

Just as it is in English, the definition for most Hebrew and Greek words include more than a single meaning. A good example of this is how the Greek word *hamartia* (Greek Strong’s #266) is used. This word is translated in the Bible as “sin.” But its definition not only includes individual sins, but also “a state of sinfulness as an *integral element of someone’s nature*” (3), or: “proneness to sin, sinful *desire* or *propensity*” (4). And because it can mean either individual sins or the sin nature, when reading Scripture it is important to know which meaning for sin is being used. Therefore, whenever the reader encounters the word “sin” in the New Testament, it ought to be replaced with the phrase “the sin nature”

in order to determine how the word is being used. It will normally become apparent through the context of the verse if it is speaking of specific sin or the sin nature. In some cases, both applications of the definition will apply because the two are so closely related since the sin nature produces the individual sins.

Often people will assume the definition that tradition attaches to a word used in a given verse. But since the definition of the same word can completely change the meaning of a verse, we should not allow tradition to dictate that definition. It is obviously important to use the right definition of each word for the context in which it is used.

Erroneous theology may also be the reason why some of the Hebrew and Greek words in manuscripts are translated with the wrong definitions. Since most Hebrew and Greek words have more than one definition, theological perspective cannot help but to play an important role in translation. It goes without saying that if the wrong definition of the original word is used, it will also often result in the wrong English word used in the translation.

A good example of possibly using the wrong Greek definition of a word (due to faulty tradition and/or erroneous theology) comes in the translation of the Greek word *apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. A discussion of this word and its usage in the verse is coming up in the next chapter.

Words in Italics⁹

Due to the complexity of language as well as various idioms of the corresponding cultures, it is not possible to perfectly translate from Hebrew and Greek to English in a word-for-word manner. Translators will therefore at times add a word or phrase not found in the original manuscript being translated. When this happens, these words are usually italicized, showing what the translators **think** would clarify the verse or passage. Words set in italics can't help but be colored by the translators' own theological views and understandings of the Scripture. In some areas of Scripture these views could be mistaken. This is especially true when it comes to the pervasive influence of tradition. It helps to have a team of translators. But due to the universality of some traditions,

traditional views may not have been avoided entirely. It is therefore a helpful practice, when reading Scripture, to mentally remove italicized words to see if this might give new insight to the verse or passage.

Synonymous Words and Phrases

To rightly divide, we want to understand which words and phrases are synonymous with each other. We can interchange “God,” “Holy Spirit,” and “Jesus Christ” when considering moral performance and character. So also are we many times able to interchange: “love” (*agape*), “being in the Spirit,” “new man,” “new self,” and “new creature” when it comes to action and thought. In a similar manner, since Satan is the antithesis of God, substituting his name in place of God’s would give the opposite meaning to the verse or passage. Such we find when replacing “being in the Spirit” with “being in the flesh,” or “new man” with “old man,” or “love”¹⁰ with “hate.” An example of this could be shown using God’s grace. Part of His grace is indwelling us with His Spirit and Jesus Christ while making us part of His body. When we substitute the word “grace” with “Spirit” or “the Spirit of God” or “the influence of the Spirit of God” in many verses, they become more understandable, and new light radiates on the message being delivered.¹¹ Take a look at 1 Corinthians 13. This is the well-known chapter on what biblical love is. Scripture says God is love (1 John 4:8). In the KJV, the Greek word *agape* which is translated “love” in 1 John 4:8, is translated “charity” in 1 Corinthians 13 (most of the other translations translate it as “love”). Since God is love, we should be able to replace the word “charity” used in the chapter with “God” (or “Jesus Christ,” “Holy Spirit,” “God the Father”) and the passage should remain consistent. And it does. We can likewise replace the word “charity” with the phrase “being in the Spirit,” with equivalent results, since being “in the Spirit” is Jesus Christ, living through us.¹² Again we see the consistency of the substitution.

Grammar

To handle God’s Word more accurately, a basic understanding of grammar, as well as access to the grammatical notation of Scripture, is essential. I did not originally know this when the Lord first revealed to

me the idea of this book's subject. Later, God's providence arranged for me to see an advertisement on a Christian television program for the *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*. The Lord prompted me to order it because it gave the Strong's numbers and grammatical notations, along with definitions, to many words and phrases in the Old and New Testaments. This was helpful to the weekly Bible studies I gave. After receiving that Bible, I then obtained the computerized version, which had expanded to include all definitions and grammatical notations to the words in the New Testament and many in the Old Testament.

I had no idea how much difference this information would make in understanding what God was really saying in His Word. As an example, what tense was the action in? The aorist tense would indicate a simple undefined action normally happening in the past, whereas the imperfect tense would be of a continuous action usually happening in the past. The perfect tense is an action completed in the past with current results or consequences, whereas the pluperfect tense refers to an action completed in the past with results ending before the current time. For us to know the tense God intends when using a word or passage might help us to see its true meaning, which may be quite different from what we understood before.

The *voice* of a word or phrase determines the relationship between the subject and the verb. An *active voice* means that the subject actually does the action indicated by the verb, as in "Jim hit the wall." The word "hit" is in the active voice because the subject, Jim, did the hitting. The *passive voice* indicates the reception of the action. "The wall was hit by Jim." Here "was hit" is in the passive voice because the subject "wall" received the hit. But the Greek language has a third voice that we do not have in English. It is called the *middle voice*: "the grammatical voice that signifies that the subject of the verb is being affected by its own action or is acting upon itself" (5). We will see later how the middle voice supports the God-given ability to make the choice involving salvation.

The purpose of this section is not to give a grammar lesson. It is simply introduced to make the reader aware of the significance of comprehending the biblical use of grammar in order to plumb the depths of God's Word and to help rightly divide it and handle it accurately. God is precise, but usually a verse or passage will be interpreted without even

considering the grammar He inspired in the writing of Scripture. At times our interpretations will not only be wrong, but they will then lead to divisiveness in the body of Christ. Through the computer software now commonly available, a student has access to extensive grammatical support for their study of the Bible.

Chapter Breaks

In English writing, the change of a chapter normally means a change of subject matter. In the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, however, there were no punctuation marks or chapter breaks. In our Bible translations they have been added in, but these were not added by the direct inspiration of God. Therefore, if the passage being studied is at the end, or the beginning, of a chapter, it is wise to read before and after the chapter break to see if the continuity of the subject being discussed is interrupted by the chapter break. A good example of this is going from the sixteenth to the seventeenth chapter of Matthew. Taking out the chapter break between these two chapters, the text would read, “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 16:28-17:2). No doubt many have read this with the chapter break and not connected the verses with the unity of understanding as to what was meant by this passage. But by taking out the chapter break it is easy to see that when He said “the Son of man coming in his kingdom,” He was referring to the transfiguration.

Chapter breaks also seem to unnaturally interrupt other scriptural discourses in such passages as Romans 5-6, 2 Corinthians 5-6, and Hebrews 5-6. God, in His sovereignty, has allowed us to add chapter breaks during the middle of a subject being discussed, and this is especially true in the New Testament. Why? Well, as to the understanding of what any Scripture means, I quote the Bible: “Seek, and ye shall find” (Matt. 7:7).

CONCLUSION

It is very important to *rightly divide* the word of truth when dissecting and trying to comprehend what Scripture is saying to us. In handling God's word accurately, we must understand more than just to what particular group of people any book of the Bible is speaking to, although that is of primary importance. We must also understand to which individuals any chapter, verse, passage, or even any part of chapter, verse, or passage is speaking to; regardless of what book of the Bible it comes from. Likewise, is the Scripture speaking from inside of or outside of time, from the spiritual or the physical perspective? What is the proper contextual meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word? And, of course, let us never forget to always take Scripture passages in their proper context. All the rightly dividing principles just mentioned go to waste if we do not take Scripture in its correct context.

One last subject I want to briefly touch may not be so much rightly dividing and handling accurately the Word of Truth as much as handling accurately our minds. Let us resist ever closing our minds to any new or different idea simply because that idea may not harmonize with what we have always heard or been taught. Many scriptural teachings are held because of tradition—"it's what everybody believes." Whereas not all tradition is wrong (2 Thess. 3:6), Christ and the Scriptures spoke against it more than once (Matt. 15:6; Mark 7:8, 9, 13; Col. 2:8). It is also important that we don't let our own pride stand in our way because new ideas are different from what we have come to believe on our own in the past. No mortal human being has all the truth, and every one of us is deceived in various areas and subjects in our lives. There is nothing innately wrong with being deceived because it simply means believing something that is not true—just like ignorance is uninformed or unenlightened. Normally it is due to the fact that that is all we have ever heard or been taught on a particular given subject. We don't even know where and how we are deceived because if we did know, by definition, we wouldn't be deceived. Deceit is an enormous weapon of Satan, "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). The teaching of evolution is a good example of this. Many Christians today believe in some type of evolution because that is what they were taught while attending public school. Many of us believed in evolution for that very