

Making Proper Divisions in the Bible

Introduction:

1. In **2 Timothy 2:15** God explains to believers how to study the Bible. God says that you must rightly divide it. "Rightly divide" means "to cut straight."
2. There are divisions in the Bible that must be distinguished. If you do not recognize these divisions, you cannot be an **approved** workman.
 - There are many people who are workmen, who study the Bible diligently, and who may be very sincere, but the issue is not sincerity or the amount of time invested in the study of God's Word (although these are both very important).
 - The overriding issue is this: if you do not learn how to rightly divide God's Word, you will not be an approved workman, and your teaching will not be sound.
3. You may ask, "How do I learn to rightly divide God's Word and make the proper distinctions in God's Word?"
 - The Bible not only commands you to do it, but it shows you how to do it.
4. There is a simple three fold division that the apostle Paul gives us in Ephesians 2 that will provide a general guide in helping us to rightly divide the Scripture.
5. These are not the only divisions we see in Scripture, but it will give us a panoramic view of God's dealings with mankind and how it is laid out in Scripture.

"Time Past" – vs. 11-12

1. According to the Bible, what is "time past?" There is one major, unmistakable characteristic. God made a distinction between the circumcision (the nation of Israel), and the uncircumcision (the Gentile nations).
 - Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham. This covenant promised that from Abraham would come a great nation in the earth. God would give this nation (Israel) the Canaan land area as an everlasting possession. **Genesis 17:6-14**
 - God made a distinction between Israel and all the other nations of the earth. Circumcision was the physical sign of that division. As a Jew, Christ was also circumcised the eighth day. **Luke 2:21**
2. The covenant of circumcision built a wall between Israel and the other Gentile nations. This **physical** distinction brought **spiritual** ramifications. **Ephesians 2:12; cf. Genesis 17:14**
3. Here is the basic characteristic of time past: God dealt with humanity on the basis of a distinction between Israel (the circumcision) and the Gentiles (the uncircumcision).
 - When you see this distinction, you know you are in time past.
4. It wasn't that God was unconcerned with the rest of the world. The Gentiles would receive their blessing through Abraham's seed (Israel). As Israel served and honored the true God, God's blessings upon them were to flow to the other nations. **Genesis 22:17-18; Isaiah 60:1-5**
5. There was a middle wall of partition between Israel and the nations that was erected through circumcision and the Law of Moses. **Ephesians 2:14**
 - This wall was to protect Israel as the chosen people of God. It was to protect them from the idolatry and heathen practices of the Gentiles so that the knowledge of God could flow to the nations.

"But Now" – vs. 13-18

1. The Bible is quite clear. God's dealings with mankind have changed today.
 - The middle wall of partition between Israel and the Gentiles has been broken down.
 - The Jew no longer enjoys a favored status in the eyes of God.
 - Jews and Gentiles stand before God on an absolute equal basis.
 - Jew or Gentile individuals can be reconciled to God through personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
 - Jew and Gentile believers are brought into a spiritual union called the body of Christ, and both enjoy equal privilege and access before God.
2. Why do Gentiles enjoy such an unparalleled opportunity today? Two basic reasons:
 - Israel's fall - **Romans 11:11, 30**
 - God's mercy and grace - **Romans 11:32; Ephesians 3:8**
3. This "but now" time period that we are enjoying today is called "*the dispensation of the grace of God.*" **Ephesians 3:2**
4. This time period was kept secret in time past until God revealed it first through Paul, and then God used Paul to reveal it to others. **Ephesians 3:3-6; cf. Galatians 2:2-9**

"Ages to Come" – vs. 5-7

1. This dispensation of grace will not last forever. It will one day come to an end with the Body of Christ being caught up out of the earth to occupy its position in heavenly places. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**
2. But what will become of this earth once the body of Christ is caught up?
 - The nation of Israel will once again become the focus. Israel will encounter a seven year purging called "the time of Jacob's trouble." **Jeremiah 30:7**
 - After this, Christ will return to this earth and will rule and reign as Israel's Messiah and King. Israel will finally become the blessing to all nations that God originally intended and promised them. **Romans 11:25-27**
3. In the ages to come, Christ will become the focus of everything. **Ephesians 1:10**
 - Christ will be glorified in the heavens through His body (the church).
 - Christ will be glorified on earth through His chosen vessel, Israel.

In Conclusion:

1. God has laid out your Bible in a way that corresponds beautifully with Paul's three-fold timeline in Ephesians 2.
 - **Time Past** - Genesis through Acts (Israel having a favored status over the Gentiles)
 - **But Now** - Romans through Philemon (Israel and Gentiles standing on an equal basis)
 - **Ages to Come** - Hebrews through Revelation (Israel's future purging and place of blessing on the earth)
2. May this lesson serve as a useful tool in helping the believer to be an approved workman, rightly dividing the word of truth.