

Two Essentials in Rightly Dividing God's Word – Part 1 1 Corinthians 10:32-11:2

Introduction:

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2. But you must know how to study it in order to get the profit out of it that God intended.
 - You must follow God's prescribed method of study. God has given us this in **2 Timothy 2:15**. "Rightly dividing" literally means "to cut straight."
3. If we read the context, we learn that there were two men that were erring in doctrine. How were they erring?
 - They were saying that the resurrection was past. What did this result in? The overthrowing and subverting of other believers.
 - These guys did not leave and abandon the Scriptures, yet they were clearly teaching false doctrine. It isn't that they were unscriptural, but they were simply failing to rightly divide God's Word.
 - By simply misplacing the time period of the resurrection, they were involved in false doctrine. If the resurrection was past, we are no longer in the time of grace, but in the last days of prophecy.
4. Here in our text, we find two essentials that are absolutely necessary if a person is to rightly divide God's Word.

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2. Notice how Paul divides humanity into three groups in **1 Corinthians 10:32**.
 - Jews - those who are members of the nation of Israel
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 - The church of God - those who are members of the body of Christ in this present dispensation of grace - **Ephesians 1:22-23; Galatians 3:26-28**
3. God's Word is always directly addressing one of these groups, or individuals within one of these groups.
4. Remember this: the entire Bible is written **for** us, but it is not all written **to** us.
 - The command to build the ark
 - The command to build the temple
 - Christ's command to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Spirit
 - The Sabbath day command to be observed specifically on the seventh day
5. Many of the events in the Bible are written for our example and for our practical application (**1 Corinthians 10:6, 11**). They are not written for us to build a doctrine around.
 - **Illustration:** A pastor says, "Every Christian should bring in gold and jewelry to help pay the bills for the church because that's what they did in the Old Testament to build the tabernacle."
 - This is false doctrine. Why? Because that Scripture wasn't written directly to us. It was never written for that purpose. Can we learn from it? Yes, but we don't build a doctrine around it. This was clearly for Israel.

6. Every passage has a **doctrinal** application for the group addressed and a **practical** application for people of all ages.
 - In **Acts 2:38**, who is God addressing through Peter? The context is clear - the house of Israel. vs. 36
 - Yet people have built an entire doctrinal belief system around this verse. Yet they conveniently ignore verses 44-45.
7. Dispensationalism is basically just a time line of history and recognizing God's instructions for mankind in those different time periods.
 - You recognize the differences of how God was working and you recognize where you are in the divine history of the ages.
 - God never changes, but His dealings with man change. God's instructions on how He desires man to respond to Him and what He would have them do have indeed changed throughout the course of history.
8. Those who fail to make a distinction in God's messages will end up confused and sometimes completely bewildered.
 - For example, we are not required to offer animal sacrifices that were required under the Old Testament law system.
9. The entire Bible is written for our learning, but it is presumptuous to think that the entire Bible is written directly to us. People in past ages have needed God's instruction, and people in future time periods (tribulation and kingdom) will also need God's instruction.
10. God's Word is a marvelous book that shows us God's Word to different people in different time periods under different circumstances.
11. We can learn from all of it, but it simply is not all written directly to us. As we rightly divide, we examine carefully who God is addressing and in what time period.

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.

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Second, you must know who God's spokesman is for you today.

1. In every time period throughout Biblical history, we see that God had a spokesman.
 - Noah was a preacher of righteousness and was God's spokesman in his day.
 - Moses was God's spokesman when Israel left Egypt.
 - John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles were God's spokesmen leading up to the cross.
 - Peter was God's spokesman on the day of Pentecost.
2. The responsibility of mankind in every dispensation is to **listen** to God's spokesman and **believe** his message.
3. As we approach God's Word, we must ask ourselves, "Who has God appointed as our spokesman for today?"
4. This is an extremely important question if we are to rightly divide God's Word. Let me give you an example of just how vital it is.
 - **Genesis 1:27-29** - mankind is given a strictly vegetarian diet.
 - **Genesis 9:1-3** - Noah was allowed to eat anything he could catch. This is a change to the dietary laws.
 - **Leviticus 11:1-11** - God establishes His covenant with Israel through Moses and lists things they could not eat. It wasn't just that they shouldn't eat these things - it was an **abomination** to eat them.

- What if a Jew would have said to Moses, "Thanks Moses, but I like Genesis 9 better. I like a little bacon with my eggs. It's Scripture, its Bible. Instead of Leviticus 11, I want to go by Genesis 9. All God's promises are mine, so I'm going to claim Genesis 9 and God will bless me"?
 - According to God's Word, this man would have been committing an abomination before God. A man could be quoting and obeying Scripture, yet be completely out of the will of God. Why? Because he failed to see that God had changed His program since Genesis 9. God had formed Israel and gave them His law.
- **1 Timothy 4:4-5** - Paul tells Timothy to eat anything he wants to eat - its all okay.
5. Can you see how people could look at these different verses concerning your diet and become confused? This is only one subject of many in the Bible. If you don't know who your spokesman is, you are in trouble! You don't know which set of instructions to go by.
 6. You must know where **you** fit in the plan of God and who **your** spokesman is. Who is our spokesman today for the dispensation of grace? Where can we go in God's Word and find specific doctrine and instruction for us today?
 7. Let's look at **1 Corinthians 11:1**. Who were the Corinthians to be following? The Bible is clear. The man who wrote this letter, the apostle Paul. Also read 4:16-17, 14:37.
 8. Some will try to say that the word "*followers*" should be rendered "imitators." This is very weak and inaccurate. You are not to **imitate** Paul or anybody else.
 - We don't even imitate Christ. An imitation is a cheap counterfeit. It's not the real, genuine thing. You are **not** to imitate God. God can't be cloned. The greatest imitator of God in this universe is Satan, and we know he is a counterfeit and fake.
 - You are to **follow** God. We take what He has instructed (His truth), and obey it, and follow Him by faith.
 - God desires for you to be who He has created you in Christ, and simply allow Christ to express Himself through you as you obey His Word by faith.
 9. So, if you are to follow Christ today, how do you do it? You do it by following Paul and the instructions God gave him to give to us. Paul said he was a **pattern** for all other believers today (**1 Timothy 1:16**), and what do you do with a pattern? You follow it.
 10. Paul's words are the words of Christ for us today (**1 Timothy 6:2-3**). Notice that Paul describes his teaching in three ways in verse 3.
 - He calls his doctrine "*wholesome words.*"
 - He calls his doctrine "*the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
 - He claims that his doctrine is "*according to godliness.*"
 11. All of Christ's words are not in red in a red letter Bible. They only put in red the words He spoke during His earthly ministry to Israel. But Christ gave Paul direct revelation from heaven to give to the Gentiles. **Galatians 1:11-12; Romans 11:13; 1 Timothy 2:7**
 - In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the "*abundance of the revelations*" that he had received from heaven.

12. Paul's words in the books of Romans through Philemon are Christ's words for us today. If we are to follow Christ in the right way, we must follow Paul and the instructions and teachings that he has given to us. **Philippians 4:9**
13. Remember, all of the Bible is **for** us, but it is not all written directly **to** us. Sometimes you may read verses in other parts of your Bible that seem to contradict Paul's teaching for the time of grace today.
14. In reality, the apparent contradictions are simply different sets of instructions, given during different periods of time, under different programs.
15. Paul told Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:7**, "*Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.*"
16. As we study Paul's writings and consider what **our** spokesman says **first**, it will give us a greater understanding and appreciation for all of God's Word. We will be on our way to "*rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

Understanding Where You Fit in the Plan of God

Introduction

1. Last week we saw a threefold division in Ephesians 2 that serves as a general guide in helping us to rightly divide God's Word.
2. Most **false** doctrine today is **true** doctrine that has been misplaced into the wrong time period. Most people have no clue as to where they fit in the overall plan of God.
3. The Bible can be a very dangerous Book if it is taken out of context and misappropriated.
4. Here is a quick overview of the threefold time line division that we studied last week:
 - **"Time Past"** - God dealt with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentile nations (vs. 11-12). The knowledge and blessing of God would flow to the world through the channel of the nation of Israel.
 - **"But Now"** - Today, Israel enjoys no favored status before God. Jews and Gentiles stand before God on an equal basis. Salvation is being offered to **all** individuals through the finished work of Jesus Christ, and believers are placed into one body. We are living in an unprecedented time of God's grace to the entire world. vs. 13-18
 - **"Ages to Come"** - When the body of Christ is caught up to heaven it will end this time of grace, and the prophesied events of Israel's last days and kingdom on earth will take place. vs. 7
5. Most false doctrine today is true doctrine taken from God's "time past" program or "ages to come" program and then misapplied to today.
6. In this lesson we will seek to give you the tools needed to rightly divide between these three time periods and understand where you fit in the plan of God.

Matthew through John belong in God's "time past" program.

1. One of the biggest mistakes people make is when they go to Christ's earthly ministry to find doctrine for the body of Christ today.

2. They assume that these books are directed to the body of Christ because their Bible index classifies them as "New Testament."
3. It is a tremendous blessing to read of Christ's earthly ministry and to see His love for needy people, His sinless life, and His great wisdom in various situations. There is much we can learn and some wonderful application we can make to our own lives.
 - Of course, the most blessed part of reading the gospels is reading of our Savior's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection which provides eternal life for us.
4. But we must understand the purpose of Christ's earthly ministry. Romans 15:8 states that *"Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God."*
 - Jesus came to minister to His people, Israel. Jesus said in Matthew 15:24, *"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*
5. Do you remember how Paul defined "time past" in Ephesians 2:11-12? There was a middle wall of partition between Israel and the Gentiles, with Israel enjoying great spiritual privilege. God dealt with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.
6. Is the middle wall of partition still present in Matthew through John? Is there still a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles? Let's examine some pertinent verses.
 - The gospels open with John the Baptist preaching only to Israel the baptism of repentance. **Mark 1:4-5**
 - Christ is born a Jew, circumcised the eighth day, and is said to have come to save *"his people"* from their sins. **Luke 2:21, 1:68-69, 76-77; Matthew 1:21**
 - The twelve are sent **only** to the lost sheep of Israel. **Matthew 10:5-7**
 - A Gentile woman approaches Christ, and He tells her He is only sent to Israel. She recognizes this distinction, and Christ honors her understanding and faith. **Matthew 15:22-28**
 - Jesus tells the woman at the well that *"salvation is of the Jews."* **John 4:22**
 - After His resurrection, Christ tells the twelve to proclaim His resurrection, but they must begin at Jerusalem. It is obvious, the Jew is still enjoying a spiritual advantage even at the end of the gospels. **Luke 24:47**
7. Three important things are happening simultaneously in the gospels:
 - Christ is calling His people, Israel, to repentance.

- Christ is preparing the "little flock" of believing Israel for the future time of wrath and their coming kingdom to earth. So certain parts of the gospels are dealing with the "ages to come."
 - Christ is preparing to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. While believers **today** can clearly **look back** and see this, those living at that time did not understand the necessity of Christ's death. **Matthew 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34**
8. Can you see now why the four gospels belong in God's "time past" program? Clearly, God is still dealing with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.

The "but now" time of grace that we are enjoying today was not revealed in the four gospels.

1. One of the biggest mistakes people make is when they read the body of Christ today back into the four gospels.
2. As we learned in last week's lesson, today God is not dealing with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.
 - Today, Jews and Gentiles have both been cut off, but grace is being offered based on the complete and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin.
Romans 3:9-10, 22-24, 11:32
 - This grace is being offered on an equal basis. **Romans 10:12-13**
3. This time of grace was a mystery, hidden in God from the foundation of the world. It **was** a secret, but is now revealed. The apostle Paul was the instrument God used to reveal this time of grace. **Ephesians 3:1-9**
4. There is a great division in the Bible between God's "time past" program and God's "but now" program. Although there is some transitional overlapping, the basic dividing line is the saving and commissioning of the apostle Paul in Acts 9. Paul is our apostle. **Romans 11:13**

In Conclusion

1. Here is a brief synopsis to help you to distinguish between God's "time past" and "but now" programs.

- "Time past" program - Salvation and blessing would go to all the nations through the **rise** of the nation of Israel. This plan has been made known since the world began (**Acts 3:20-21**). This plan will find its ultimate fulfillment in the "ages to come." **Isaiah 60:1-5**
 - "But now" program - Salvation and blessing is being offered today to all people through of the **fall** of Israel. This plan was kept secret since the world began, but then revealed through Paul. **Colossians 1:25-26; Romans 16:25**
2. God is offering to this world an undeserved grace period. When it is over, the prophesied "ages to come" will commence.
 3. We do not know when this grace period will end, so may God find us laboring to spread the message of His grace to all people. This is where we fit in the plan of God.

Scroll down to next page for Bible study chart that coincides with this lesson.

