

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Neil Girrard

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15) It has been observed that the “church,” the counterfeit of the bride and people of Christ, most often simply reduces Paul’s instruction to Timothy to merely “understanding” the word of truth. That is, if we “rightly understand” the word of truth (which simultaneously more often refers to that sect’s peculiar “doctrines” and “theology” than it does to the word of God), then we have appropriately obeyed Paul’s instruction here. The appropriate question to ask here is, if the Holy Spirit (who inspired Paul to write these words) had meant to refer to mere understanding, why didn’t Paul use the word “understanding”? What if the Holy Spirit really meant “divide” the word of truth?

When we look at the original Greek, we find that the process of “rightly dividing” differs profoundly from simple “understanding.” We also find a minor instance of confusion in the King James New Testament. We find “understanding” is used 24 times in 22 verses yet we find that *eight* different Greek words are rendered as “understanding.” These are:

1. *Asunetos* – “without intelligence, foolish, ignorant” [801] Total KJV occurrences: 5
2. *Sunesis* – “a mental putting together” [4907] Total KJV occurrences: 7
3. *Parakoloutheo* – “attend, conform to” [3877] Total KJV occurrences: 4
4. *Nous* – “intellect or mind” [3563] Total KJV occurrences: 24
5. *Phren* – “mind or cognitive faculties” [5424] Total KJV occurrences: 2
6. *Dianoia* – “deep thought or exercise of the mind” [1271] Total KJV occurrences: 13
7. *Suniemi* – “to put together mentally or comprehend” [4920] Total KJV occurrences: 26
8. *Noieo* – “exercise the mind, observe, comprehend” [3539] Total KJV occurrences: 14

When we look at “rightly dividing” we find that it is a very specific word that is used – and it is only used this one time in the New Testament. This unique usage seems to be one method employed by the Holy Spirit to eliminate even the possibility of confusion. Paul’s instruction to Timothy says that those who are diligent to be approved by God will be able to *rightly divide* – Greek *orthotomeo* [3718] which means “to make a straight cut, that is, (figuratively) to dissect (expound) correctly (the divine message).” (Strong’s) It is a construction term. It refers to dividing something like a board or a brick into a usable size and cutting away the unusable parts. The Greek word itself derives from a compound of *orthos* “right” [3717] and the base of *tomotos* “cut decisively, as if by one stroke.” [5114] This word, *orthos* [3717], in spite of the over-emphasis given it in many “church” circles (“orthodoxy”) is only used twice – once when Paul tells a crippled man at Lystra to “Stand up straight [3717] on your feet!” And the man leaped up and walked. (Acts 14:10) In the second occurrence, the writer of Hebrews warns us to “make straight [3717] paths for your feet” so that what is already lame will not become completely useless and paralyzed. (Heb. 12:13) The Amplified version expands this word as “cut through and make firm and plain and smooth, straight paths.” Again, the separating

of usable parts away from the unusable comes into view as one cuts away the humps, fills in holes and removes rocks to make a smooth, clear and level walkway.

We find at least two other instances in the New Testament where truth is compared to a sword that cuts. Paul said that the word of God that is the Spirit of God is the sword that God provides so that we can effectively contend against the evil spirits that war against us. (Eph. 6:17) And the writer of Hebrews uses the second part of the compound word Paul used to Timothy to refer to the word of God (a Person and not a book) in a similar way. He writes, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper [5114] than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) The word of God, he writes, is “sharper” (Greek, *tomoteros* “cut decisively, as if by one stroke” [5114]) than any double-edged sword. He then uses similar ideas and writes that the word of God is “piercing” (*diikneomai* [1338]) even to the “division” (*merismos* [3311] from which we have derived words like “meridian”) of soul and spirit, joints and marrow and is a “discerner” or “judge” (*kritikos* [2924] from which we have derived the words “critic” and “critical”) of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. This is the right dividing that is done by the word of God in our lives. There is a cutting away of one thing to produce something that is functional in God’s kingdom.

There are two aspects of rightly dividing the word of truth that are implied here. First is that this is a work that cannot be done by the flesh but must be done in connection with and in submission to the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.” (Jn. 16:13) If we are not guided by the Spirit of truth (which is the Spirit of Christ and God), we will not find pure truth. We may find facts and even accumulate some wisdom but to be led into all truth we must progressively and routinely surrender more and more to His leading. It is only by submitting to His guidance that we can ever hope to rightly divide any word of truth.

Second is that we must evaluate all the elements that go into rightly dividing any word of truth on the basis of *God’s* righteous standards. Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (Jn. 7:24) The writer of Hebrews told us that “Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Heb. 5:14) If we would make truly righteous judgments, rightly divide the word of truth and rightly apply it to the situations we find ourselves involved in, we must regularly exercise this facet of our existence. We cannot begin with carnal attitudes or worldly philosophy and hope to reach a righteous and true conclusion. Rightly dividing any word of truth is a *spiritual* exercise that must be done in harmony with and reliance upon the Spirit of God. Any other effort will not produce a right division of truth but will produce only a corrupted perversion that will ruin those who partake of it.

This is the method by which men (calling themselves “bishops”) arose from the ranks of the elders and, speaking corrupted versions of “truth,” drew followers after themselves. (Acts 20:30) Paul wrote “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive.” (Eph. 4:14) Any “church” that teaches the need to rely upon mere men for “truth,” “doctrine” and “theology” is merely a scam, a con-game (Greek, *methodeia* [3180]) and only those who teach and *practice* the need for *every* believer to hear and follow the Lord wherever He leads are those who are genuinely producing disciples for Christ. (see Jn. 10:27, Mt. 28:19)

Christ is the King of truth. (Jn. 18:36-37) It is inevitable that those who genuinely follow Him must come into all truth. To be led into all truth, we must be led out of all lies that we believe to be true – no matter how cherished and deeply rooted these deceptive traditions and beliefs of ours may be. God will be faithful to disillusion us in any and every area of our life that is based on deceptive illusions and not upon rightly divided words of truth. It is His nature to do so and we ought not be surprised or upset when He remains true to His nature.

Paul warned that the last days would be perilous. (2 Tim. 3:1) Part of that danger stems from the people having turned from hearing truth (from the Spirit of truth) and instead heaping up teachers who tickle their ears. (2 Tim. 4:3-4) Part of what these teachers preach and practice are “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1) interspersed with “great swelling words of emptiness [that] allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.” (2 Pet. 2:18) If we would cease to listen to the false prophets who ruin their hearers and draw followers after themselves and instead became focused on hearing only Christ by His Spirit, we would see, experience and produce a much different way of following Christ and God. It would be a way characterized by love, peace, righteousness, joy and genuinely divine wisdom. It would not be the way of rival “churches” stealing “sheep” from one another nor that of heaped up spiritual gurus competing for their share of the “Christian” market so that they can show by their wealth and number of followers that they really do have God’s approval. The way of deception will never be the way of truth.

God’s approval is vastly different from man’s approval. The worker who handles the gospel of Christ with reverence and accuracy is the one who has been diligent to gain God’s approval of his works. This one routinely and habitually makes every effort and is increasingly humbly able to rightly divide the word of truth in whatever situation he or she finds themselves in. This is what Paul told Timothy and it is true for everyone who dares to step into this reality. This is the way that has been forsaken by today’s churchianity and those who refuse to love the truth no matter what the cost will be those given over to strong delusion (2 Ths. 2:11-12), one element of that delusion being that their preferred method of “church” really is approved by God and their “doctrines” and “theology” really is the rightly divided word of truth. The end times will be perilous indeed and many of that last generation will be summarily dismissed by Christ for having practiced lawlessness, what was right in their own eyes, rather than God’s righteousness, what was right in God’s eyes. (Mt. 7:23) It is God’s remnant who perseveres to the very end who will be saved (Mt. 24:13) – one element of that perseverance will certainly be that they have taken care to routinely rightly divide the word of truth that God has placed before them. Those who handle the word of truth with carelessness or who use it for financial or carnal gain will certainly experience a very different reality for all of eternity.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org
Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org
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