

# The Importance of Rightly Dividing the Word

## A Theology of One

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I was recently speaking with a Christian friend of mine and I premised a statement with the words, “*I know this sounds self-serving, but*”... and I went on to express to him that I feel as though a vast majority (if not all) the problems plaguing the modern church can be traced back to a failure to see the distinctions God has made in scripture (I know it was the cause of most of *my* error and confusion over the years). My friend quickly chastised me for putting *any* caveats on my statement! A failure to even *seek* those distinctions has led many to ruin and has enslaved many more to the systems of men. How many have handed over their obligation to “study” and to “seek” to a man or to a system or to both?

In my journey with Christ, I have seen a lot of “movements” and plenty of “systems,” but it was not until the glorious word and personal command “study” exploded into my life that the scriptures came alive for me. I was educated in a denominational system and even taught classes in that system. After discovering the grace of God I sought answers to my Bible questions in multiple systems. I attended countless Bible studies, conferences and camps. I’ve even preached from numerous pulpits and taught classes in various organizations. *But if you don’t “understand” what you are reading, it matters not how many times or in how many settings you read it.*

**If ten different seminaries teach ten different things about baptism, can we simply accept someone’s word merely because he has a degree from a seminary?**

It was not until I grasped Paul’s inspired command to “study” that I truly undertook a real search to understand the scriptures for myself. The word “study” lets me know that God understands that I do not understand all things! If I did (or if a system or organization had all understanding) there would be no need for the individual to “study.” But God has commanded us to study (and to “rightly divide”), and it is our *obligation* to do so. Unlike the men of another age who were given understanding and inspired to speak the words of God, we must endeavor to seek out truth. We must be willing to do the homework!

I have often said that I have but one theology, the theology of Michael Scotto, for I will answer for that theology alone. Thankfully, of all the conclusions or near-conclusions at which I have arrived I have found others who have arrived at the same place. There are issues for which I sought the thoughts of others, but in the end, I must taste, chew, evaluate and eventually swallow only that which I can truly say is mine.

## Trapped in a System and Handed an Answer Key

*How many have ceased to study or have never truly studied because they are locked into a church system?*

I engaged in a conversation with a denominational woman regarding the Book of Acts. After our cordial exchange she noted that what I was saying made sense and that it was more consistent than her position, but she rejected what she was seeing in her Bible *because her church doesn’t teach it!*

I engaged a Pastor in a discussion of the Book of Matthew. He held a Th.D. and had been a pastor some 58 years. After he dismissed my questions by stating that he had “*settled those issues long ago*” and by saying “*Biblicists have written on that question many times,*” I asked

him what Bible issue or passage he had recently wrestled with. He said “*none.*” I then asked him what verse or passage he had wrestled with in the last 20 years, to which he again responded “*none.*” I said that if he had such a great grasp of the scripture and since there were no doctrines or passages over which he did not have complete mastery, then my questions should be rather simple for him to answer! But he still chose not to answer me.

I was in a Sunday School class and the teacher handed us a chart (he had a degree from a Bible college so no *difficult* questions were expected from us simple lay folk). He went down his chart - on which he had “Israel” on one side and “the Church” on the other - and we came to “Old Covenant” on the Israel side and “New Covenant” on the Church side. I asked a *simple* question, “Have you ever read the New Covenant?” He told me he would speak with me after class.

As I stood in the hall after class, the teacher made a line straight to me with his Bible open to the words of our Lord at the Passover meal, “This is the cup of the New Covenant in my blood.” He told me emphatically that the verse confirmed his assertion that the New Covenant is for the church of this age.

I opened my Bible and started to read Jeremiah 31. I asked him if the things found there (a) sounded like they were addressed to the church body in this age or (b) sounded like the conditions that pervade the age in which we live. His answer, “*well, those things are slowly coming to pass.*” I thought that was quite a departure. He went from teaching that we are *in* the New Covenant today to suddenly stating that it is merely “*slowly coming to pass.*” I asked him if he would have answered that way five minutes before he came running up to me in the hall. He looked at his watch and said that he’d “love” to continue our discussion later, but that he had to go (we never did continue it).

### **First Step: Admit Our Inadequacies**

My point is not that I am clever or that I enjoy puzzling Christians (I had to overcome my own stubbornness and reliance on an “answer key”), it is merely to illustrate how many are educated in a system, declare that they now have the answers and instruct the rest of us to defer all things to their lambskin scrolls. I am certainly no “Bible scholar” and I don’t believe that anyone else is either! We are all to “study” and we must all make our Bible study *intensely personal*.

### **I only try to get folks who were given an answer key after they became Christians to put it down and start on a journey of personal Bible study for themselves.**

Yes, we help each other. Yes, we can profit from those who have spent time before us studying. Yes, we discuss and seek clarity from books, commentaries and messages. But in the end, we must make our doctrines our own. There are several issues for which I have read, listened, discussed and studied and have not yet come squarely down on one side or the other. There are other issues that I had to settle for myself and I set out to do just that. I had to convince myself from the scripture, not just simply adopt the conclusions of a system or the traditions of an organization.

If there ever was a textual scholar, if there ever was a Greek and Hebrew scholar, it was the brilliant Dr. E. W. Bullinger. Yet this wise and decorated man was never above correction; even correction that contradicted his world-renowned writings! When a young Charles Welch confronted the good Doctor concerning an inconsistency all through his writings on the epistles, the brilliant man laughed and responded: “*That scraps half the books I have written! But we want the Truth, and the Truth is there in what you have said.*”

That is the spirit of a true seeker of God!

## **Drawing an Arbitrary Line Whilst Ignoring the Consequences**

With that being stated, I must come back to rightly dividing the word of truth. For if that is not where we start our quest for knowledge and enlightenment, we will end up building arks, collecting two of every creature, eating cow dung sandwiches, erecting altars, refusing to preach to gentiles, writing letters to the twelve tribes, ignoring our wives and standing around graveyards trying to raise the dead!

When our Lord stated that the good news of the kingdom was meant for the Jew... when he said that he came to minister to Israel... when he said that the message of the kingdom was to be declared *by Jews to Jews*... when Paul tells us that the Lord came to confirm the promises made to Israel's fathers... when Paul tells us that the Jew had an advantage in that age... we do ourselves a great disservice by arbitrarily drawing a line at Acts 2 (because the "system" demands it) only to then find ourselves accusing the apostles of racism, ignorance and intolerance for just about everything that happens from Acts 2 to the end of the book.

If you've been in a "the Church starts at Acts 2" system, you know you've heard those disrespectful accusations! Peter had no idea what he was doing in the Acts Age, but we, *some 2000 years later*, are wiser, more thoughtful and more obedient than he? God allowed them to function in error because of their blindness and stubbornness? We owe Peter and the other apostles a grand apology!

Commentaries on the Acts state that Peter and the apostles would not oppose the keeping of the Law in order to avoid unnecessarily "offending" Jewish believers? May we teach that today? May we separate Jew from Gentile? Is that the "pattern" we are to uphold?

And why do so many accept that arbitrary line despite the gross inconsistencies the Book of Acts presents compared with the conditions later observed in the Post-Acts epistles and on to today? Because their systems are built on it. Their hierarchies depend on it. Yet those who claim to be part of that number, when they do find gaping inconsistencies (with the Book of Acts and with the Acts epistles) determine that it is not *they* who might be in error, no, they turn on the hand-picked Apostles of God and charge these men with all sorts of ignorance! By doing so, they then undermine the very epistles and the very book they claim as patterns. For how can they follow or trust men who functioned according to such ignorance, racism and stubbornness? How can they claim that inspired men functioned in ignorance?

## **A Theology of One**

This is not as most of my writings are (attempts to understand and interpret scripture). And I write as one who has only come into my current understanding within the last few years. This is merely an encouragement for those who have discovered the wonders and joys found in a determination to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" to carry on. In the end you shall answer for *A Theology of One* and if we continue to see ourselves abandoned as was our Apostle, so be it. Our call is to "study" in a manner that is worthy of our calling.

Those of us who have left the dark cave of Acts 2 are often accused of ruining our eyesight by entering into the light of understanding given us by our Apostle in his revelation of the current age. We must be content to hear such accusations. We find ourselves "*abandoned by all*" as was our Apostle. Should any follow us, the light may at first cause them to shade their eyes, but as they allow their eyes to adjust to the light, they will be on their own road of "studying" and we will have found another committed to "rightly dividing the Word of Truth." Our joy will be in seeing the scales fall from their eyes the glow of enlightenment and understanding on their faces. Ultimately, we will be a step closer to our prize and the satisfaction that we have sought honestly to "show [ourselves] approved unto God" rather than "unto men."