

Right Division

by

E.W. Bullinger

The one great requirement of the Word is grounded on the fact that it is "the Word of truth." And this fact is so stated as to imply that, unless the Word is thus rightly divided we shall not get "truth"; and that we shall get its truth only in proportion to the measure in which we divide it rightly. The Requirement is thus stated in II Tim. 2:15: "Give diligence to present thyself approved to God, a workman having no cause to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth."

The word in question here *orthotomounta*. As this word occurs in no Greek writer, or even elsewhere in the New Testament, we can get little or no help from outside, and are confined to Biblical usage.

It is used twice in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *vashar*, to be right, or straight. In Prov. 3:6; 11:5, the Hebrew is *Piel*, to make right (as in II Chron. 23:30; Prov. 15:21; Isa. 40:3; 45:2,13). But it is the Greek word that we have to do with here, in II Tim. 2:15; and we cannot get away from the fact that *temno* means to cut; or, from the fact that we cannot cut without dividing. To divide belongs to the very nature of the act of cutting. Even as applied to directing one's way it implies that we divide off one way from others — because we desire to follow the right way and avoid the wrong.

The only Biblical guide we have to the usage of the word is in Prov. 3:6, "In all thy ways acknowledge him And he shall direct thy paths." In the margin the R.V. gives, "make straight or plain" as an alternative rendering for "direct." But our ways can only be made straight or plain by God's causing us to proceed on our Way aright — i.e., by avoiding all the ways that are wrong, and going in the one way that is right; in other words, the right way is divided off from all the wrong ways.

What else can the word mean in II Tim. 2:15? It matters little what others have thought or said. We could fill a page with their names and their views, but we should learn but little and only become confused. The duties of Priests, Furriers, and Ploughmen have been referred to as indicating the correct meaning. But we need not leave the Biblical usage, which associates the word with guidance in the right way.

The scope of the verse plainly teaches that:

Our one great study is to seek God's approval, and not man's.

We are to show all diligence in pursuing this study.

As workmen, our aim is to have no cause to be ashamed of our work.

In order to gain God's approval and avert our own shame we must rightly divide the word of truth.

To do this we must direct our studies in the right way.

This great requirement is associated with the Word in its special character as being the Word of truth; i.e., "the true Word."

All this tells us that we shall not get the truth if we do not thus rightly divide it; and that we shall get the truth only in proportion to our "rightly dividing" it.

Other titles of the Word have their own special requirements. As "the engrafted Word" it must be received with meekness (Jas. 1:21). As "the Faithful Word" we must

hold it fast (Tit. 1:9). As "the Word of life" we must hold it forth (Phil. 2:16). But, because this is "the Word of truth," its paths must be well noted, the sign-posts must be observed, the directions and guides which are in the Word itself must be followed. We are to "give diligence" to this great Requirement of the Word just because it is "the Word of truth."

Rightly dividing the Word as to its Subject Matter

It is the common belief that every part of the Bible is to be interpreted directly as referring to the Church of God; or as pertaining to every person, at every stage of the world's history. This neglect of the precept to rightly divide it is an effectual bar to the right understanding of it, and to our enjoyment in its study. This non-understanding of the Word is the explanation of its neglect, and this neglect is the reason why so many who should be feeding on the spiritual food of the Word are so ill-fed in themselves; and so ill-furnished for every good work (II Tim. 3:17). While the Word of God is written for all persons, and for all time, yet it is as true that not every part of it is addressed to all persons or about all persons in all time.

Three distinct classes of persons

Every word is "written for our learning," and contains what all ought to know: yet, its subject-matter is written according to the principle involved in I Cor. 10:32, and is written concerning one or other of three distinct classes of persons:

"The Jews,
The Gentiles,
and The Church of God."

According to the general belief, everything that goes to make up the subject-matter of the Word of God is about only one of these three: and, whatever may be said about the other two (the Jews and the Gentiles), all is to be interpreted of only the one, viz., the Church of God. This comes of that inbred

selfishness which pertains to human nature: which, doing with this as with all beside, is ever ready to appropriate that which belongs to others. But no greater impediment to a right understanding of the Word could possibly be devised.

We are quite aware that, in saying this, we lay ourselves open to the charge which has been made by some, that we are "robbing them of their Bible." But the charge is groundless; and it arises from a total misapprehension of what we mean, or from a perversion of what we have said. It is necessary, therefore, for us to repeat, and to state categorically our belief that every word from Genesis to Revelation is written for the Church of God. There is not one word that we can do without: not one word that we can dispense with, without loss. We deprive no one of any portion of the Word of Truth. We protest against robbery in this sphere, as in all others.

It is not we who rob the Church of God; but it is they who rob the Jews and the Gentiles. We would fain restore stolen property to the rightful owners; property which has been stolen by the very persons who charge us with robbery! We may indeed retort in the words of Rom. 2:21: "Thou that preachest a man should not steal, Dost thou steal? " We are prepared to make this counter-charge, and to sustain it. The charge against us we disclaim; while those who make it are themselves guilty of the very offence for which they condemn us.

We hold that what is written to and about the Jew, belongs to and must be interpreted of the Jew. We hold that what is written of and about the Gentile; belongs to and must be interpreted of the Gentile. We hold that what is written to and about the Church of God, belongs to and must be interpreted of the Church of God. Is this robbery? or, Is it justice? Is it stealing? or, Is it restitution?

Evidence of the misappropriation (to use a milder term) is furnished by the Bible which lies open before us. In speaking of the page-headings of Isa. 29 and 30, in our current editions

of the English Bibles (KJV), in which the former is declared to be " Judgment upon Jerusalem"; and the latter, "God's mercies to his church." . What is this but not only wrongly dividing the Word of truth, but the introduction of error, by robbing Jerusalem of her promised "mercies" and appropriating these stolen mercies to the Church? while the "judgments" are left for Jerusalem, just as burglars take away what is portable, and leave behind what they do not want or cannot carry away.

We believe God when He says that the Visions shown to Isaiah were "concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (Isa. 1:1). True, they were written for us; and "for our learning " (Rom. 15:4); but they are not addressed to us, or written concerning us, but "concerning Judah and Jerusalem."

It would be an act of dishonesty, therefore, for us thus to appropriate, by interpreting of ourselves, that which was spoken of Israel. In like manner, if we take, as some do, the words of the Epistle to the Ephesians as though they were written to or concerning the Gentiles (or the unconverted world), then we not only rob the Church of God of its most precious heritage, but we teach the "Universal Fatherhood of God" instead of His Fatherhood of only those who are His children in Christ Jesus. It will thus be seen that unless we rightly divide the subject-matter of the Word of truth we shall not get the truth, but shall get error instead.

Every part of the Bible is written "concerning" one or other of these three divisions, or classes of persons. Sometimes in the same passage or book there may be that which is concerning all three. Sometimes a whole book may be concerning only one of these three, and the other two be altogether excluded. We may all three learn much from what is written of only the one; for the inspired, God-breathed Word is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction," for all who shall read it (II Tim. 3:16). That which happened to Israel happened unto them for ensamples; "and they are written for our admonition " (1 Cor. 10:11).

"Whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4).

But while this is so, and remains true; what we mean is that every Scripture is written concerning one or other of these three classes; and is especially addressed to that particular class. This class has therefore the prior claim to that Scripture. The interpretation of it belongs to that class; while the other two may apply it to themselves, and are to learn from it. But, inasmuch as it is only an application and not the interpretation, such application must be made only so far as it agrees with the interpretation of those Scriptures which are specially addressed to and relate to such class. Otherwise we shall find ourselves using one truth to upset another truth; we shall be setting what is true of one class in opposition to what is true of another class.

All that we are concerned with now is the right dividing of the subject-matter of the Bible, which is three-fold. And the great requirement of the Word as to this is, that we should, and must, whenever we study any portion of the Word of God, ask the question, "**Concerning whom is this written?**"

Whichever of the three it may be, we must be careful to confine and limit the interpretation of that passage to the class whom it concerns; while we may make any application of it to ourselves so long as it does not conflict with what is written elsewhere concerning "the church of God."

We must not take that which concerns the Jew and interpret it of the Church. We must not take that which concerns the Church and interpret it of the world. We must not take what is said concerning the Gentile and interpret it of the Church. If we do, we shall get darkness instead of light, confusion instead of instruction, trouble instead of peace, and error instead of truth.