

## 10 PRINCIPLES AND 7 STEPS TO RIGHTLY DIVIDE

Many people have undertaken the effort to read the Holy Bible in its entirety. Most people have read or know of portions of the Bible. Many readers admit they do not understand it very well, for the Bible is a book that reads like no other book. It does not read like a novel or a newspaper or a technical paper. It is a special *spiritual* Book that is *spiritually* understood.

The Bible is a collection of sixty-six individual books, written by about forty men either directly inspired by God in their writing, or by men copying the inspired words of a prophet. These men wrote over a period of centuries, in different countries, to various people and for different reasons. The Bible simply states, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

By this variety in writings, God creates an infinite number of patterns of truth that a humble student can follow, comparing scripture with scripture; with the aim of gaining revelation from God’s holy word. A diligent student of the word can trace these patterns by comparing words, events, thoughts, and the multiple testimonies God provides. But without the method God teaches for studying His Book and the means of Holy Spirit as the Guide, one can easily go astray and find himself wresting the scriptures to his own destruction.

At the same time, many things in the Bible are “plain to him that understandeth.” God’s word is both milk and meat. It can comfort and encourage, and also reprove and correct. Every person will understand some things but not others. Some verses are clear and plain, while others are hard to understand. Even the same passages can be at the same time both simple enough for a child to learn and understand, and of great depth that the seasoned student of the word struggles to grasp the whole of it.

The Bible reveals the mind of the only and true God – and His will – to His creation. And, as the Revelation says, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” It speaks of the Great Creator, His creation, the character of man, the commandments of God, the care God takes for His people. It shows us the nature of Sin, the work of Satan, and the redemption of the only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It instructs us how to live, train our children, do our business, serve our God, and love our neighbor. It tells us of things past, gives us wisdom for things present, and prepares us for the future. It gives mankind the moral foundation for all areas of life, warning of an eternal judgment. It speaks of God, devils, heaven and hell, and what happens after death. It is the necessary food for the soul. As Jesus said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4).

The Bible’s sixty-six books were revealed piece-meal, and canonized as we know it around 397 A.D. Since there are the many different books in the Holy Bible that make up the complete written revelation of God to us, and each one of these written at a different time to different people, and with various writing styles, and in at least two languages; the approach to learning the Bible is different than what most people are used to. There are many things strange to the reader at first, so that the student of the word of God must be diligent to read and re-read the Bible many times, so that the passages become familiar. Until the mind of man has received the whole, he cannot rightly apply the whole counsel of God – and until then God cannot call to his memory things he has read. The Bible is intended to be read multiple times, daily, and with great import. It is to be read continually during one’s life.

When opening the Bible for the first time, the reader will notice an Old and New Testament. The Old speaks of things before the advent of Christ. The New Testament is brought to us by Jesus Christ – and that by means of His sacrificial death, burial and resurrection. This Testament was sealed with the blood of Christ and offers all men the gift of eternal salvation by grace through faith.

To better understand the Old Testament, one must read the New Testament first – else the Old Testament is somewhat of a mystery. To best understand the New Testament, one should start with the Gospel of John, and follow that reading with Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. These two books in the New Testament were written especially for new-comers. Once these two books are read and somewhat understood, the remainder of the New Testament should be read from beginning to end – Matthew through Revelation.

Once the New Testament is read in its entirety, the student should start in the Old Testament and read Genesis through Malachi. This order of reading put the reader on the fast-track of getting to know his Bible.

There are things a student of the word of God can do to better understand the meaning and application of the scriptures. By learning these *principles of God*, he will have the means to proper exegesis.

#### 10 PRINCIPLES TO RIGHTLY DIVIDE:

1. First accept that no man can ever know everything God knows. God is all knowing and his ways are past finding out. The best a student of the word can do is to continually get light from God Himself as he studies the Bible. Since a man can never be at the same level as God, man can only get the portion of understanding that God gives him. But that light that God gives is more valuable than gold or rubies. "Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom" (Proverbs 18:1).

Even if God, at one time, were to fill the hearts and minds of *all* men to maximum capacity with the knowledge of Himself and his creation, and to fill each man with a different portion than the other; I say that the whole of God's knowledge dispensed would not even be as a drop in the ocean compared to what knowledge God still has reserved to Himself.

God's ways are past finding out, and who has been his counselor?

God gives different abilities and talents to each of his servants. He gives varied depths of knowledge to his children, so that one man may be expert in some study, where another man has better understanding of a different topic. God gives to each man as he wills. God then promises that if we seek, we will find. The student of the word of God can faithfully ask for and receive wisdom from God in anything, and God will give it.

2. God reveals His mind to men by means of the Holy Spirit. To say a man must be born again before he can receive the things of the Spirit is fundamental, but it must be said regardless. There are so many people who reject the counsel of God in salvation, yet attempt to study and rightly understand the Holy Bible. This cannot be done. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The Bible is a spiritual Book. One must be in fellowship with the Author in order to understand the Writer's intent. Read Job 32:8.

3. True holiness is another prerequisite to receiving the knowledge of God. The student must be holy in mind and body, and continually strive to be so. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....* Sin blinds the mind; holiness gives light.

An important aspect of this holiness is *faith* that God's word is true and perfect. One cannot second-guess or be critical of God's word, and still expect to learn. The student must submit himself to the authority of God – the authority of God's word (which, in English, is the King James Version of 1611).

And a third comment on holiness: The student of God's word must not be biased or prejudiced in his study. One does not go to the Bible to "prove what *he* thinks is so," but rather, go to the Bible to "prove *whether* his thinking is right, and *know* what to think." Once the precepts of God are established are in the moral fiber of the mind, then the student can build on what he "knows to be true."

4. Prayer is needed to prepare the student for the Master's teaching. Sometimes it may take weeks for God to reveal the meaning of something (as with Daniel). Prayer calibrates the spirit and allows God to work in the heart and mind of the child of God. Those that read the Bible prayerfully advance much farther than those who do not.
5. Diligent study is required. How easy it would be if God just deposited all needed knowledge into our minds the moment we were saved (some may think he did). But God intends for us to read and re-read His

word for our entire lives, continually meditating on His words and passages. In time, the passages that were once strange become familiar, and then well known. And, as we live our lives those verses we pondered become even more real as God shows us daily how His word is practically applied in every issue of life. Through the diligent study of God's word we expand the capacity of our mind to receive the things of God.

6. Obedience to what is revealed is absolutely necessary if one is to understand – Psalm 111:10: *A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.* We learn by doing. No man learned much without practice. Those things that people “learn” without work and application are easily forgotten. The Bible is a “doctrinal” Book, or a book that teaches *what to do*.

And think about this: Why would a Just God continue to instruct a student who does not do what He says? If one refuses the little things, why would God give greater things? He that is faithful in little is also faithful in much.

Consequently, mark and receive the commandments of God as written in the New Testament. Jesus instructed this method in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18 – 20, when he said – after we teach the gospel and baptize believers – to “teach them *to observe* all things whatsoever I have commanded you....” More on this is below in the *Seven Steps*.

7. Maturity brings more knowledge and experience, and knowledge and experience brings more maturity. Young men are strong because the word dwells in them, and they have overcome the wicked one. *When I was a child I thought as a child*, Paul said. The thoughts of a man are different from those of a child.

One man said this: You thought differently in your teens than you did when you were a child. You thought differently in your twenties than when you did were in your teens. You thought differently in your thirties than you did when you were in your twenties. You thought differently in your forties than you did when you were in your thirties. You think differently in your fifties than you did when you were in your forties. And in your sixties you will think differently than you do now.

This is not because the word of God changes, but the word of God changes us. We are not the same as we mature in the things of God. This is not to say that old men are always wise – this is not true. Sometimes a younger man rightly searches things out what the older man cannot see. We must not think of physical age as the key to understanding the things of God, but rather one's experience with God, and time and effort put into the study of the word of God. Meat belongs to them of age, while the new born babes desire the milk of God's word.

8. Jesus Christ must be found in every passage. Our Saviour said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” The only reliable testimony of Jesus Christ is found in the scriptures. The scriptures speak of Jesus Christ. Unless the student finds Jesus in his study, he has missed the mark. Find the Saviour and you have found the purpose of the revelation. All else flows from this.

Even passages in the Old Testament are discerned from a view point that reveals Jesus Christ. The student has failed in his study if he has not found Jesus revealed, pointed to, or magnified in some way.

9. Follow the process God gives us in Isaiah 28:9-11: precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Learn and do the first commandments (precepts); then read the entire Bible over and over – every line; then do your topical studies. The first two processes establish proper foundational knowledge before one can build on his understanding.
10. Seek out the profit of the scriptures – doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness – 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

## 7 STEPS TO RIGHTLY DIVIDE

These steps are familiar to any person who, with an honest heart, has sought out to know what God says in his word. One should remember these “here a little, there a little” topical studies come *after* the multi-layered foundation of precepts and lines is set.

### **Collect**

Using a concordance or by reading line upon line, gather all passages that relate to your topic of study. This is accomplished by the proper selection of words, along with their variations and related words. Related words to teach include nouns, verbs, and modifiers based on the root word. Think also of opposites and synonyms, and harmony passages. Make a list of the verses and write or print out the verses.

As one writes this collection of passages, other word studies will be revealed that necessitate further study. Do not neglect when God leads you to other words or ideas. Write these for further research.

### **Collate**

Separate (“divide”) the passages in groups based on what they say. God will give wisdom in this. Select major thoughts from each group and a verse or two that well-defines the truth being communicated. This grouping of passages requires the reading in context of each portion. Familiarity with Bible will help greatly in this action – things are easier and faster if the student is familiar with what he is reading.

Classify passages that have no direct bearing on the subject put these aside. There will be verses that have no direct impact on the study. It is part of study to miss verses and at the same time have too many. Depending on the subject being studied, you may be able to reduce the number of verses to just a handful that clearly define the key thoughts.

### **Commandments**

Highlight, understand, and do the commandments as they are revealed. We arrange our thoughts *making sure no conclusion violates a commandment*. They are the precepts – the foundation on which all spiritual truth is built.

The commandments, when identified clearly, create the boundary lines for your ideas to travel, not allowing the student to veer too far to one side or the other. They are the rails on which your train of thought progresses. Gods *will* as revealed in scripture never violates his *commandments* – God is neither double-minded nor unstable. He is not the author of confusion.

As I have illustrated many times: regardless of the volumes written and the great studies made by intelligent Calvinists to somehow prove God only saves a select few who he has predestined; all these words can be brought to naught by a single and simple commandment found in Acts 17:30: “*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent....*”

Those Calvinists with a good heart could have saved themselves a lot of grief and error by building on the precepts (commandments) first. The others have willingly deceived people by their writings.

### **Consider**

Take the necessary time to meditate on the things you are studying. Read passages slowly, carefully, and repeatedly. Make notes as God leads in your study – always have ready a pen and paper when reading your Bible.

Ask yourself what is the likely meaning of what you have read. Answer who, what, where, when, and why. Ask how it shows Jesus Christ. Seek the application for today and how your life can be made better. Meditate and memorize asking God for illumination. Humbly ask God for something special.

Think of biblical parables or patterns in God’s creation that help to clarify your thoughts. Consider the practical effect of the thoughts you are forming. Do they tend to promote holiness and Christ-likeness? Do they edify the child of God? Are they pure, lovely, and of good report? Do they inspire virtue and praise? (Philippians 4:8). Do they magnify Jesus Christ?

## **Commentaries**

With carefulness, commentaries can be of some value. These are opinions of men who have attempted to put forth their understanding of a passage. However, know that men are fallible. Their writings could be wrong. Never take an opinion a writer simply based on your esteem of his person. Opinions should be considered and discarded if they are proved incorrect or unsubstantiated by the word of God. These should also be referred to *last* in a study.

It is always best to first spend time with God, seeking his wisdom, and allow the Holy Ghost to illuminate you mind; before running to some man's notes to only get what he provides. If you seek God first, you will get more from him than from a man. Too many run to their favorite author before first seeking after God. In time, a person like this will forget how to seek light from God, and will instead rely upon his library. Don't be a "commentary cripple" – learn the means to get the light directly from the Father through the Spirit. Relying on men will cause the student of the word to be weak at making his own righteous conclusions, and make him nothing more than a parrot, regurgitating only what someone else said. Learn to let God feed you mind and soul through a personal relationship.

Then, when God shows you something, it is something to get excited about. This is where the passion and zeal for preaching comes from. Some stated that, "preaching is the overflow of study." The student's mind is so enlightened he is provoked with great enthusiasm to write his paper and preach what God has showed him. Not only is the preacher edified, but he now edifies others.

In contrast, the dry research of volumes of men's ideas, sorting what is reasonable and applicable; and forming with that some tedious lesson helps only a little. Earl Stevens said, "Tedium is never a useful teaching tool." I prefer when the daystar arises in the student's heart because God showed his wisdom and grace to that man, blessing him with a light that God knows will especially reveal great understanding. If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. And when God gives it, the preacher can scarce wait until he has the opportunity to preach it to those he loves. You can tell when this happens. The student rushes to write his thoughts as though divinely inspired.

Lest the reader conclude differently, I am not against the use of commentaries, lexicons, dictionaries, study guides, etc.; if they are referred to late in the study and taken with caution (men's writing can be biased or follow an agenda). There is necessity and great profit in searching word etymology and translations. Seeking the use of the Greek or Hebrew words has much profit – but God's revelation of understanding and wisdom is rarely based on the meaning of one particular word. One must discern the thoughts of God contained in the groups of words and the phraseology He uses. We understand the logic from the grammar, and the meaning of thoughts from the words. Both are important, and we never take one and not the other. And, the student that seeks God first, will know enough to discern which can and cannot be relied upon when comparing commentary.

## **Conclude**

Arriving at a conclusion should be made in small steps based on truth. One should build on the things he knows to be true and that are without a doubt. The student is forging and connecting links of thoughts and small conclusions to create a chain of truth and to establish rhetoric. Any weak link will cause the whole to fail. Every link must be proved before it provides a fast hold (I Thessalonians 5:21). The first steps deal with commandments, first mentions, words of the Saviour, beginnings, etc.

Proving a truth involves both inductive and deductive study. One considers a thought true and then tries to prove by the Bible. He then considers the same thought untrue and tries to disprove it. If it passes both tests it can be thought to be true. Many times, a thing is true with exceptions, or within certain conditions. If this is the case, these conditions should be mentioned. For example: *Men lie – except for the Son of Man – who is indeed both man and God man, and He cannot lie.* (Psalm 40:4; Psalm 58:3; Proverbs 6:19; Proverbs 14:5, 25; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; John 14:6; I Peter 2:21, 22.)

## **Communicate**

This step is not generally realized and often overlooked. The purpose of diligent study goes beyond the one studying. We must condense and paraphrase our conclusions to as simple a statement as possible, for the communication of these thoughts to others. Distilling the complicated thought to a ready proverb or simple statement makes it easily communicated. God gives bread, not only for your eating, but also for you to feed others. God wants to use his servants as a pipeline of his gifts, not a reservoir. Many times these conclusions can be the

points in a homily, chapters in a study book, or a helpful cliché. Sometimes they are the making of a lengthy paper. Think on this wise – how can I make my conclusions ready for communication to others?

Preachers do this regularly when forming preaching outline notes. Précis-writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, speaking in parables, making statements of faith, etc.; are examples of good communication of one's understanding. Much of our responsibility as preachers involves this type of work – the result of diligent study.

Being a means by which God's light is reflected to others is a work that imitates the greatest preachers in the Bible.

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