

"Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth"

TEXT: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15)

THESIS: To instruct Christians to look at the Word of God carefully when applying what it states.

INTRODUCTION:

1. In Acts 8:30-31, it expresses there the importance of correctly interpreting the Scriptures.
 - a. It states, "Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him."
 - b. Now, it is sadly the case that many times 2 Peter 1:20-21 have been incorrectly used.
 - i. God states there, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."
2. When we study Scripture, we are quickly introduced to the word, Hermeneutics.
 - a. The word Hermes is of Greek mythology and was believed to be the god who brought messages from the gods to mortals. Hence the god of speech, writing, and art.
 - b. Hermeneutics therefore, is the science and methodology of interpretation.
 - c. Sacred Hermeneutics is the method of interpreting & applying Scripture so as to logically discover the meaning of the Bible.
3. And so, we must learn to "rightly divide the word of truth" so we can ascertain biblical authority.
 - a. This is important because as Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48).
 - b. However, God said in 2 Pet. 3:15-16, that there, ". . . are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."
 - c. And so it is because of this twisting, that we must realize that not only is, "All Scripture given by inspiration of God . . ." (2 Tim. 3:16-17), but that we need to be able to understand what we read so that we can apply God's Word to our lives.
4. Therefore, I would like to spend some time looking at the different types of hermeneutics.

DISCUSSION:

I. "SACRED HERMENEUTICS"

- A. When we think of sacred hermeneutics, there are several ways in which biblical authority can be determined.

1. First, the Bible authorizes by DIRECT COMMANDS.
 - a. When the psalmist said, "You have commanded us To keep Your precepts (rules, doctrine) diligently" (Psa. 119:4), this clearly shows a direct command.
 - (1) Fear God and Keep His commandments. (Eccl 12:13).
 - (2) Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
 - b. All of these are precise and clear statements which leaves no guessing.
2. Second, the Bible authorizes by NECESSARY CONCLUSIONS or IMPLICATIONS.
 - a. We see, for example, the logical implication in Luke 13:3, 5 where Jesus said "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."
 - b. In Acts 18:8 another example is shown where, "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."
 - c. These commands are implied even though they are not directly expressed statements.
 - (1) They are necessary understandings that carry the same force as direct commands.
 - (2) And so, we must make sure to notice that the things understood are also necessary.
 - (a) For example, we read in Acts 16:33, regarding the Philippian jailor that, "immediately he and all his family were baptized."
 - (b) We can learn from this verse how important they saw baptism.
3. Third, the Bible authorizes by APPROVED / APOSTOLIC EXAMPLES.
 - a. 1 Cor 11:24-25 tells us, "when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."
 - (1) Now, I want to notice one thing here.
 - (2) Paul here says that he broke the bread, and then, he begins to quote the words of Jesus and what they did during the days of the feast of unleavened bread which was that they broke the bread, ate it and then drank the cup.
 - (3) Nowhere does the Bible state or suggest that the Lord's body was broken, physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually on the cross.
 - (4) But, Paul does show here that he gives his approval of the

- breaking of bread and the drinking of the contents of the cup.
- b. In Acts 20:6-7, we see the apostolic example again from Paul to remember the Lord's supper.
4. Fourth, the Bible authorizes by EXPEDIENCIES or opportunities.
- a. "Expediency relates to the realm of human judgment in connection with Christian obligations.
- (1) In expediency, there is the underlying notion of ADVANTAGE.
 - (2) That is, an expedient is something which EXPEDITES.
 - (3) There can be no expediency where there is no obligation, and there can be no expediency where there is no advantage."
- b. So, for anything to be expedient according to Bible teaching, it must give opportunity in doing what God would have man to do, and be authorized by His word."
- (1) Opportunities are such as:
 - (a) Mk 16:15, Go ye into all the world.
 - (b) Eph. 5:19, Speaking to ourselves in psalms.
 - (2) Now, in dealing with opportunities and being authorized, there are also Divine Traditions & Human Traditions that must be considered.
 - (a) Divine Traditions are the expressions of God's will.
 - i) In 1 Cor 11:2, Paul stated, ". . . keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you."
 - ii) In 2 Thess. 2:15 we are told, "brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle."
 - iii) Also, in 2 Thess. 3:6 Paul commanded us, ". . . in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."
 - (b) Now, human Traditions can be good in expediting God's will, but they can also be bad in violating God's will.
 - i) For example, the traditions found in Mat 15:1-9 and how they attempted to bind where God had not bound.
 - ii) But, then we come to Rom 16:16 and to, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you." The church would practice this more if we were closer

spiritually.

- B. So, Sacred Hermeneutics looks at all points of the Bible, letting the Bible be its best guide whether by direct commands, implications, apostolic authority or opportunities.

II. "NEW HERMENEUTICS"

- A. Some say that the Bible is not a book of laws but is rather a love letter.
1. They quote, "To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law." (1 Cor. 9:21)
 2. However, "he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (Jam. 1:25)
 3. Grace and law are not mutually exclusive; rather they compliment each other (Eph 2:8-9).
- B. Yet, we are still told that "we should not look to the Bible for "patterns."
1. They claim there is no pattern of salvation; No pattern of worship.
 - a. However, "The sum of thy word is truth; And every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever." (Psa. 119:160 ASV).
 2. Besides, God has always given man a blueprint.
 - a. In the Old, "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it." (Exo 25:9)
 - b. In the New, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 1:13)
 - c. In addition to this, Paul talked about the form or pattern of doctrine (Rom. 6:17)
 - d. Thomas Campbell in his Declaration & Address, said, "The original pattern laid down in the N.T.; the divine Word is our standard; making a rule of it & it alone; what is expressly revealed & enjoined in the Holy Scripture."
- C. "New Hermeneutics" is nothing more than disguised existentialism meaning that people are entirely free and thus responsible for what they make of themselves
1. This is interpreting the Bible toward what you feel is right.
 2. But the Bible warns against this approach to the Bible.
 - a. In Jgs 17:6, ". . . there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
 - b. In 1 Cor. 4:6, Paul states, "that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." (1 Cor. 4:6)
- D. The Bible is not just some love letter and it was not interpreted by how one feels.
1. God has always given us an understandable pattern because it is that

pattern is what leads us to God.

2. It makes no sense for God to make a pattern that no one can follow or that is dead.

III. "UTILITARIAN HERMENEUTICS"

- A. Utilitarianism is basically "What works?"
 1. If it works, it's right . . . If it doesn't work, it's wrong.
 2. The aim is to give the greatest happiness for the greatest number.
- B. And without doubt, there is "utilitarian" morality in the world and has influenced Christianity.
 1. Homosexuality; Divorce; Gambling; Abortion; Drinking is all acceptable in the United Church of Christ, for example.
 2. And, this is a "new morality" with no absolutes.
 - a. It does not matter to them that Jesus said "ye shall know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), that whoever rejects Jesus and His word will judge them (Jn. 12:48).
 - b. They do not believe that there is only one way to the Father (Jn. 14:6) and that His word is truth (Jn. 17:17).
 - c. Oprah Winfrey has this problem in her church she started that there are many ways to God.
 - (1) Now, this is not a new problem.
 - (2) Isaiah said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20)
- C. Sadly, utilitarianism is working its way into the church in different forms.
 1. Instrumental music in worship.
 2. Choruses in worship.
 3. Dramatic plays as a part of worship.
 4. Children's church.
 5. Women leaders.
 6. Homosexual leaders.
- D. And, utilitarianism demands "tolerance."
 1. Does this ring a familiar sound in our ears from the world?
 2. Now, tolerance to a utilitarian does not mean permitting each person the right to believe (or disbelieve) according to his or her own conscience.
 3. It means having to accept all values, truths, & beliefs (no matter how spiritually or morally bankrupt) as equally valid as anything else.
- E. Those who hold this view of interpreting Bible is left into accepting everyone and denying no one.
 1. Not even Satan would be denied if he walked into the door.
 2. And, from what they teach, it is evident.

IV. "NARRATIVE HERMENEUTICS"

- A. Who in here like to hear a good story?
- B. Some are saying that the use of "story-telling" though is a life-changing way of understanding authoritative texts.
 - 1. However, "Narrative hermeneutics" is terribly dependent upon reasoning and drawing a conclusion, making a logical judgment on the basis of circumstantial evidence and prior conclusions rather than on the basis of direct observation.
 - 2. What I mean is that Jesus came to earth (Jn. 1:14), He died for us, and we are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9).
 - 3. And, people will tell this story without reading and claim that this story is what God wanted us to know and that's about all He wanted us to know.
 - 4. Some go too far saying we need to get away from this "book, chapter, & verse" way of preaching and teaching.
- C. "Narrative hermeneutics" is very close to relativism basically, all judgment are based upon how it relates to an individual or situation and not really upon what God says.
 - 1. Believe what you want; what seems real to you, must be real, they say.
 - 2. Baptism; Lord's Supper; One God (He God or She God).
- D. But, God has never wanted his Word to be a storybook.
 - 1. Otherwise, He would have left out His commands (Jn. 14:15).

V. THE "NEW HERMENEUTICS" & THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT ARE CLOSELY RELATED.

- A. There are dangers in hermeneutics especially when it comes to the New Age Movement.
- B. The New Age Movement is a very large network of organizations which displays enormous ideas of unity.
 - 1. They have created their own belief system and language.
 - 2. And, they believe that "All is one."
 - a. That is, they deny any separation between humanity and nature or even between humans and God.
 - b. Thus, they divide the Word of God into spirit and law letters.
 - (1) The spirit is defined as intention or purpose while the letter is defined as actual acts supported by commands, examples or necessary drawing of conclusions.
 - (2) Now, this new hermeneutics teaches that the church should be to the spirit of the land and that obedience to the letter is optional.
- C. Also, the New Age Movement basically says: Everything is God, God is within you and therefore, "We are God."
 - 1. Therefore, since we are just God in disguise, it is only our ignorance that keeps us from realizing our divine reality and we should honor and worship ourselves.

2. For, what I determine is right, is right, thus sayeth ourselves, the lords.
- D. It is no mystery that the New Age Movement is replacing Secular Humanism.
 1. Secular Humanism says: "There is no God."
 2. While the New Age Movement says: "We are God," it is unfortunate that they seek to show when the Bible mentions God, that, He was just a human before us who evolved to Godhood.
 3. All their interpretations of the Bible therefore, are intermingled with reincarnation, karma, spiritual techniques, channeling themselves to make all religions as one universal religion.
- E. And, to the New Agers, God is seen more as an energy or consciousness with light and darkness, being male and female, being both good and bad.
 1. There are no absolutes.
 2. There are no wrongs in their interpretation of the Bible which is why they are very much like "New Hermeneutics."

CONCLUSION:

1. "Sacred Hermeneutics" is our friend.
 - a. And, we need to know how to rightly divide the Word of Truth.
 - b. And, we need to know how to help our friends to see the truth.
2. I believe most of the people we have discussed, who plead for their cause or ideas, are sincere.
 - a. But they are sincerely wrong.
 - b. Jesus said: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:32).
3. It is difficult for the truth to set us free if we are telling ourselves that the Bible is just a story telling book, filled with love letters and that whatever works for us is fine, since we are gods.
 - a. This mentality is not supported by the Bible.
4. Invitation.