

THE RIGHTLY DIVIDING BELIEVER

Rightly Dividing the Gospel in Scripture For A Correct Interpretation

How to Interpret the Bible

The core instruction for Biblical interpretation, according to 2 Timothy 2:15, is *rightly dividing* the word of truth. This verse presents the *interpretive grid* we must use if we are going to *correctly* understand what the Scripture says. Most Christians do not know that the term *rightly dividing* is in Scripture. They do not know that this key instruction is in God's Word because of faulty and incorrect modern Bible translations.

The book of 2 Timothy was written in the Greek language by the apostle Paul. Below is the Greek word, translated into English, for *rightly dividing*. It is the compound word, *orthotomeo*: *orthos* means to straighten, and *tomas* is to cut.

Orthotomeo = *straightly cut, or rightly divide.*

Modern Bible translations mistranslate this word. Here are some examples from popular Bible translation:

ESV (English Standard Version) - *rightly handling.*

NASB (New American Standard Bible) - *accurately handling.*

NIV (New International Version) - *correctly handles.*

NLT (New Living Translation) - *correctly explains.*

We want to handle and explain the Bible correctly, but that is not what the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy. He did not say, "Timothy, I want you to handle the Word of God correctly." There is nothing wrong with that statement, except Paul never said it.

Wouldn't you agree we want a Bible that says what the author wrote, and not what a translator determines is correct?

Paul said that the interpretative word has to do with *rightly dividing the Bible, not correctly handling it*. Had he wanted to say *handle*, he could have. There are several Greek words that are used throughout the New Testament that mean, *to handle* something. Paul could have used the words *thiggano*, *pselaphao*, or *ateemoo*. All of those words have to do in some form with handling something.

Paul used the word *orthotomeo*, and it has nothing to do with handling. It is NOT a handling word. It is a cutting and dividing word. It concerns *dividing something*.

If we miss this, then we miss how we are to interpret the Bible correctly, and the result is we will get it wrong. To understand the Bible, we have to **divide it**.

But where do we divide? There are no notations or marks in the Bible that say, "Divide here." This is where we must understand dispensations and we need to be **dispensational** in our interpretation of the Word of Truth.

A dispensation is a period of time. What this means is that while God never changes, over time, the way he relates to humanity *has* changed. Therefore, to be dispensational is a belief that God has related and relates to people throughout human history and today in unique ways. Each of these unique historical relationships between God and people is called a dispensation.

Here is an example: In Genesis 3:8, Adam and Eve heard the voice of the LORD God as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day. That was a different dispensation than what we are experiencing today. How do we know? Because we interpret the Bible literally, and today God doesn't walk among us.

Another example is that during the time Jesus walked on the earth, the disciples had the power to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. (See Matthew 10:6-8). Today, we do not have those apostolic powers. How do we know? Because we have not raised the dead, nor have we cleansed lepers, healed the sick, or cast out demons. That was a different dispensation. God related to mankind during that time uniquely.

There are other examples, but these two show that if we are not students who are *rightly dividing* the Word of God, we will develop false beliefs.

Building on our understanding, a dispensation is how God relates to man and reveals Himself in ways that were previously unknown.

While we can identify several dispensations in the Scripture, most people are familiar with two: The dispensation of **law**, and the dispensation of **grace**. Both dispensations cannot be in operation simultaneously. In the book of Acts, while we see the changing dispensations from law to grace operating during the same time they were proclaimed as two specific gospels; the gospel of the uncircumcision, and the gospel of the circumcision (Galatians 2:7). They were not simultaneously taught to the same group. These dispensations get mixed all the time, and the result is theological confusion.

Today we live in the **dispensation of grace**, not the dispensation of the Law. It is crucial that we divide the Scripture between Law and Grace. If it is law; it is not grace, and if it is grace; it is not law. These two cannot be mixed.

Therefore, we have to *rightly divide* the Gospel. Gospel means good news. We are saved by the Gospel. We have to rightly divide **how we are saved**.

Under the *dispensation of the Law*, there was no individual salvation like we enjoy today. A person had to follow the Law and do good works in order to be eligible to enter the future kingdom of God. Obeying and following the Law in order to be right before God was called the *Gospel of the Kingdom, or the Gospel of the circumcision* (Galatians 2:7). It was a Gospel given specifically to the Jews. It was the Gospel of Peter to Israel. Jesus, while on earth, preached the Kingdom Gospel.

An example of the Kingdom Gospel can be found in **Matthew 19:16-26**. A man came to Jesus and asked him, "what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Jesus' answer was not, "You don't have to do anything, just believe." Rather, Jesus told the man to obey the commandments, then he would have eternal life. This is not the Gospel in the dispensation of grace. How do we know? Because it is about doing, not believing.

An example of the Gospel of Grace can be found in **Acts 16:25-31**. A jailer asked Paul and Silas, "what must I do to be saved?" Their answer was not "Do the commandments." They said to the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Same question, two different answers. Why? Because one answer concerned God's dealing with man during the dispensation of the Law, and the other concerned God's dealing with man during the dispensation of Grace. The two must be separated. They cannot be mixed. How do we account for these different answers? As we read the New Testament, our interpretive grid must be that we rightly divide what is for Israel, and what is for the Body of Christ.

To be clear, today, there is only ONE Gospel. The dispensation of the law is gone. **We do not live in the dispensation of the Law; we live in the dispensation of GRACE.**

In our next session, we will discover that, just as we must rightly divide the Gospel in Scripture, we must rightly divide GRACE.