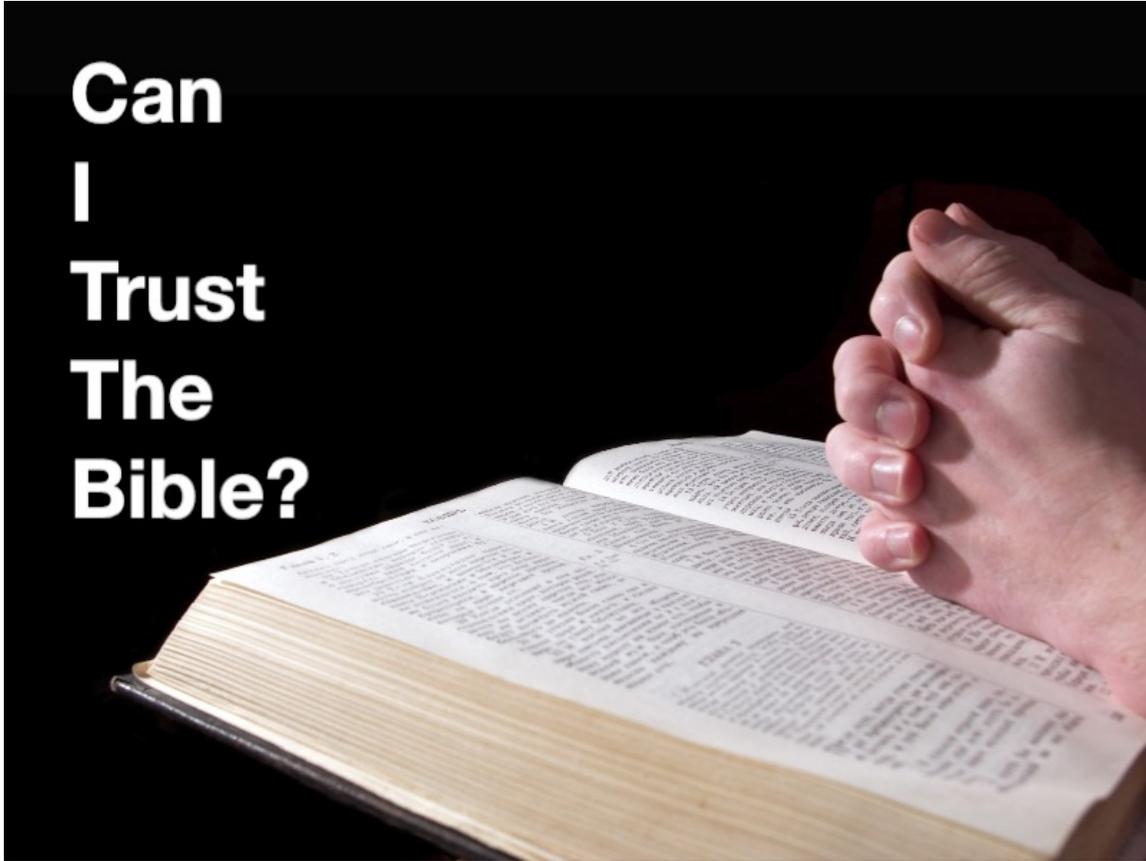


Can I Trust The Bible?



by

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Can I Trust The Bible 1

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” Hebrews 1:1-2

We know so much about God because of what He has told us about Himself in His Word. The Bible is the Revelation of God. We know He is Eternal because of what the Bible teaches us about Him. We know that He is All-Powerful because of what the Bible teaches us about Him. We know He is All-Knowing, Everywhere-Present, and Unchanging because of what the Bible teaches us about Him. We know that God is Loving, Good, Kind, Patient, Holy, Just, Righteous, Compassionate, and Forgiving because of what the Bible teaches us about Him. We know that God Loves us so much that He sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins by dying on the Cross. We know that God raised Jesus from death and promises us life after death and a home in Heaven with Him forever.

The Bible is a Treasure to Christians. We love it, believe it, and need it. We read it, memorize it, study it, and teach it to others. So why, if we know and believe these things about the Bible, do most people in the world not believe that the Bible is God’s Revelation? Why do many say they can’t trust the Bible? Why do they say it’s filled with mistakes? Why do they say the Bible is no different than any other book written by religious people about their religion? Why is the Bible

so maligned and despised around the world? Why do governments spend so much time and effort to destroy copies of the Bible and those who believe it? Lots of questions, so let's look for answers.

First, a little background about the Bible. It was written by more than 40 people over a period of about 1,500 years. Those people were from every walk of life, including kings, fishermen, poets, philosophers, and scholars. They lived and wrote on three different continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe). They wrote in three distinct languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). They wrote about every imaginable area of life, including many controversial subjects. Their writing styles included historical, legal, allegorical, poetry, personal correspondence, parables, prophetic, apocalyptic, and biographical. They wrote about their failures as well as their successes. Some wrote from inside the walls of palaces; others from inside the walls of prisons. And the most amazing fact is that all of these people agree with each other! It's almost as if one Author was behind the physical writing of 40+ authors (the Holy Spirit!). There is no other compilation of writings on earth that compare with the Bible.

I decided to do something a little different in this series of studies back in the Fall of 2011. I coordinated the **Faith and Self Defense Blog** with the **GraceLife Blog** for several studies. The Faith and Self Defense Blog looked at **what** the Bible is and **why** we should believe it. The GraceLife Blog looked at **how** we should use the Bible in our personal lives and in service to God and others. In light of the attacks on Christianity and the Bible in the United States and around the

world, I could not think of a more important use of my time and energy.

The goal of this special study series is simply to help in rebuilding the confidence Christians should have in the Bible, the desire they should have in knowing it intimately, and the work of sharing its Truths to the world. I pray you will find the studies hopeful and helpful.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 1

I want to share some thoughts with you that truly concern me. More and more Christians know less and less about God's Word. Have you noticed that fewer people bring their Bibles to church meetings now than years ago? Why is that? Is it because less copies of the Bible are available for Christians to read? Fewer Christians know how to use the Bible when talking with unsaved family and friends. They don't know where to find truth in the Word of Truth. When Christians get together, what is the first thing they talk about? Is it about a great truth God just showed them when they were studying their Bible? or something someone said on a favorite television program? or how great their favorite sports team played on the weekend? What are Christians thinking about most of the time? Is it about God or this world?

One of the most disturbing things I've seen in recent years is how liberal theology has leaked into conservative theology to the point where people on both sides are having substantial conversations to find those things that are common between them and not let what isn't common bother them. I know that the goal of unity in the Church is a good thing, but unity at the expense of obeying the Word of Truth is not what God had in mind.

Jesus prayed to His Father that those who would follow Him would be *"one as We are."* (John 17:11) In that same prayer, Jesus said, *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."* (John 17:17) The

Apostle Paul wrote the Christians in Ephesus that his desire for them was to endeavor *“to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Ephesians 4:3) Paul also told them that Jesus had given them apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip them for their service to God and to edify the Body of Christ *“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:13) In that same context, Paul also told the Ephesians – *“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:14-15) The message of the Bible is clear – we must never cling to unity at the expense of Truth. Truth, if we follow it precisely as presented in the Bible, will always lead to unity among those who obey the Truth. For those who do not obey the Truth, unity is an ideal they will never be able to attain.

I've spent most of my adult life as a professional journalist observing people and reporting about what they think, say and do. It is my observation that Christians have less interest in God's Word now than when God saved me from atheism more than 40 years ago. In just one generation, we have seen the commitment to Truth among Christians in our country collapse around us. Those of us who care can bemoan the fact that God's people have little interest in what He says in His Word – we can point our fingers and lay blame at many doorsteps – but that doesn't accomplish the one thing God wants His

people to do and that is to hear what He has to say to them.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

2 Timothy 2:15

Can I Trust The Bible 2

One of the first arguments against the trustworthiness of the Bible is that it was written by men and, therefore, is full of mistakes. It is true that men wrote the Bible, but does that mean it's flawed? Why couldn't God speak to people and make sure that what they wrote was accurate? The answer is simple: He could and He did.

The Christian Bible contains two Testaments: Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament can be further divided into the Writings of Moses, Historical Books, Poetic Books, and Prophetic Books. Even though God began speaking to people as soon as He Created them, people didn't write what God said for thousands of years. God's Words were passed from generation to generation through the process of oral tradition. If the Bible is based on oral tradition, how can we trust that each generation was 100% accurate in passing along God's Word to their children and that their children were 100% accurate in telling their children? Though God could have ensured that the oral tradition remained pure, He was waiting for the right time to speak His Word in a way that would become a permanent record for the people of the world. That time came when God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt into freedom.

God developed a Personal Speaking relationship with Moses. It began with a burning bush that didn't burn up. It continued as God instructed Moses on what to say to Pharaoh and the people of Israel.

It increased as Moses led the people of Israel across the Red Sea and into the desert between Egypt and Canaan. God spoke to Moses for 40 years and told him everything we read in the first five Books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch). The reason we know how God Created the universe, what happened to the first man and woman, why there is evil in the world, why we need God's forgiveness, is because God told Moses and Moses wrote it so Israel, and eventually the world, would have it to read.

The process of writing was not new when Moses wrote what God told Him. Moses had learned how to write on various permanent surfaces during his childhood and early adult years growing up in Pharaoh's palace. The Egyptian culture was well known in the world for its permanent writing skills. The most common writing material was made from the papyrus plant, which grew in great abundance in Egypt. Papyrus documents held up well in dry areas like Egypt. Tens of thousands of ancient papyrus documents have been found in the region. Other writing surfaces included parchment, vellum, clay, stone, wax, and pottery.

God spoke and Moses wrote - *"And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD."* (Exodus 24:4) *"So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel."* (Deuteronomy 31:9) God spoke and Moses wrote. It's a simple process. That's what I did for 40 years as a journalist: people spoke and I wrote. It's not difficult to understand. Moses spent 40 years with God and wrote what the

Almighty told Him to write.

How do we know that what Moses wrote is true? We don't have the original writings of Moses; we have copies of what he wrote. So, how can we be sure that what we have is God's Word? We'll look at that in the next part of our study, *Can I Trust The Bible*.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 2

I pay close attention to what people say when they're in life-changing situations. As a journalist I've interviewed people in every imaginable situation of life. Training and experience help journalists pick the best quotes or "sound bites" for stories. We seek the truth expressed authentically. We recognize when people are saying something that needs to be heard and repeated.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

2 Timothy 2:15

When I first read that verse soon after being saved, I knew I was reading something that needed to be heard and repeated. The Apostle Paul was writing what would most likely be his last letter on earth to someone he loved and cared about deeply. Timothy had ministered with Paul for many years. Paul was soon going to die for his faith in Christ and knew that Timothy would need strength and wisdom to continue the ministry without Paul. Timothy shared the oversight of churches with Paul and would have a lot of tough challenges ahead, so Paul wrote both of his letters to Timothy with that in mind.

Paul wrote Timothy that he needed to *"be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* and *"endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* (2 Timothy 2:1-3) Paul also told Timothy that *"the things you*

have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” He told Timothy to “remind” God’s people about everything Paul had told them, “charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.” (2 Timothy 2:14) Then Paul told Timothy to “be diligent” to present himself “approved” to God, a “worker” who does not need to be ashamed, “rightly dividing the word of truth.” Here’s Paul, nearing the end of his ministry on earth, about to die for his faith, telling Timothy how to present himself to God and how to work in a way that will not bring shame on his ministry.

What does it mean to “rightly divide” the Word of Truth? Why would a Bible student need to “divide” the Bible? The Greek word translated “rightly divide” is *orthotomeo* – “to cut straight.” It was used in the ancient world of trade (“worker”) as cutting something in a straight, proper, correct way. The word was also used for “handling” something in a correct manner. English translators have used several terms in attempting to explain the ancient meaning – correctly handles, correctly explains, accurately handling, handling with precision, teach correctly, handling aright, rightly handling, properly handling.

The Bible is the True Word of God. Those who use God’s Word in ministry should handle, explain, and teach the Bible with the greatest care – that of a master craftsman. God’s Word deserves the kind of devotion reserved for the most precious of all things. We are blessed

to have in our homes and in our hands the eternal Word of Truth. There are many who treat the Bible as if it has little or no value to shape life and transform souls for God. There are others who pervert the Word of God and wrongly divide the Truths in it. The way they handle God's Word is to "cut crooked" His Truths. We should **not** be among them. We should present ourselves to God as servant workers who care deeply for what's important to Him and "rightly divide" the Word of Truth.

How do we do that? We'll start "cutting straight" in the next part of our study, *Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth*.

Can I Trust The Bible 3

How do we know for sure that Moses wrote the first five Books of the Bible? We don't have his signature on those original Writings. We don't even have the original Writings! What we have of the Torah are copies. No one has seen the original Writings for thousands of years. So, how can we be sure Moses wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy? **Jesus said so!** Jesus Christ quoted often from the Torah and credited Moses with being the author.

“Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, ‘See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’” Matthew 8:3-5

“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.’” Matthew 19:7-8

“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’” Mark 7:10

“But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?” Mark 12:26

“Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” Luke 16:29-31

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’” Luke 24:44

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:14-15

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.” John 5:46

“Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?” John 7:19

“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?” John 7:23

This is powerful proof that Moses is the one who wrote the Law. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, certainly knew who physically wrote His Law. In fact, when Jesus was transfigured in front of His disciples, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. Moses represented the Law and Elijah the Prophets.

In the next part of our study, *Can I Trust The Bible*, we will look at proofs for the physical properties of the Torah, but the strongest and most conclusive evidence is that Jesus Christ said Moses wrote the first five Books of the Bible.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 3

“**Rightly dividing the Word of Truth**” means to handle the Word of God correctly – to cut it straight like a master craftsman. The process of being able to do that begins much like learning a highly skilled trade. First, a person must have a desire to learn the trade. Second, a master craftsman invites someone to apprentice with him or her. After a period of training, the apprentice becomes a journeyman, which means they have enough knowledge and ability in the craft to work on their own while continuing to learn more about the craft from the master craftsman. After years gaining experience as a journeyman, they earn the right to become a master craftsman and take on their own apprentices.

Jesus is the **High Master**. He chose 12 men to follow Him and learn of Him. They went through the process of being apprentices and journeymen, and most eventually became master craftsmen. The same is true of the Apostle Paul. Jesus chose Paul for the skill of apostleship and trained him over a period of many years. Paul went from being an apprentice to a journeyman and eventually a master craftsman under the High Master, Jesus. As was the process then and now, Paul chose men to follow him and learn the skilled work of Christian ministry. One of those men, Timothy, began with Paul when he was a teenager, which was a traditional time for young people to begin learning a trade from a master craftsman. We see Timothy traveling with Paul in the Book of Acts (beginning with Chapter 16), learning how to serve Christ and minister in His Name. We later see

Timothy traveling on his own to minister and getting back with Paul for feedback and more training. Finally, in 2 Timothy, we see Paul give instructions to Timothy about what it means to be a master craftsman in Christian ministry. Paul is about to die and go to Heaven and he shares his final thoughts and directions for Timothy.

The Word of Truth is **what God says**. Paul wanted Timothy to handle what God said correctly. The idea of “rightly dividing” means there is a “wrongly dividing.” Many people handle what God says incorrectly. Paul knew that Timothy had genuine faith and was gifted by God for teaching and preaching the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 1:3-7). Paul had been the model of sincere ministry for Timothy and wanted the young preacher to stay true to what he had learned (2 Timothy 1:13-14). Paul knew Timothy would face lots of opposition in his ministry and reminded him of the importance of patiently teaching the rightly divided Word of Truth in hopes that God would grant them repentance so they might know the Truth (2 Timothy 2:20-26).

Timothy would face all kinds of people in his ministry; many with bad intentions who would be *“always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (2 Timothy 3:1-7) Evil men and impostors would grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. What would Timothy need to do to face these many challenges? It’s simple – what he already knew to do.

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:13-17

Knowing the Word of Truth, being able to rightly divide the Word of Truth, and understanding how the Spirit of God works with the Word of Truth is how the man of God becomes complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. That’s when he can do this —

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” 2 Timothy 4:2-5

In the next part of our study, we’re going to see step by step how we can go from apprentice to journeyman to master craftsman so we too

can rightly divide the Word of Truth and be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Can I Trust The Bible 4

Before the days of computers and smart phones, there were typewriters and rotary phones. Even though that seems so long ago, I've experienced both in my lifetime. All of my grandparents were born in the 19th century and grew up without typewriters and phones. I've read some of the things they wrote in letters and in family Bibles and noticed their skill in written communication, even though many of them did not have a high school education. In fact, many in my family did not graduate from elementary school. Their ability to write clearly surpassed the writing skills of most people today. Writing original materials and making clear, legible copies of those writings are skills that have been known and taught for thousands of years. We can see that in our recent history with the printing press, but long before that there were scribes.

Writing developed in Mesopotamia more than 5,000 years ago. As writing became important to governments and religious groups, scribes played an increasingly important role in society. Their professional writing skills helped keep permanent records for kings, queens, governors, judges, tax collectors, priests, and wealthy families. Sacred texts were carefully copied to ensure the longevity of communication from generation to generation. Scribes were experts in how to make certain that exact copies were kept of important documents.

We see the importance of making accurate copies of the Old Testament in many passages of Scripture. It was also important that Israel's kings made their own copies of the Law of Moses, read it all the days of their lives, and do what God commanded.

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” Deuteronomy 17:18-20

As we read the history of Israel in the Old Testament, we see that copies of the Scriptures were available to the people for centuries. It was the job of the official scribes to ensure that every copy of the Old Testament writings was accurate. They used skins from clean animals to write on and the ink had to be black and of a special recipe. Every column of writing had to have between 48 and 60 lines. The scribes spoke each word as they were writing to make sure they were writing and spelling it correctly. Each document went through a review process within 30 days of copying. The review included counting the number of letters, words, and paragraphs. If mistakes

were found, the copy was not used. Only those copies that successfully passed the review process were kept. Those copies were stored carefully in safe places.

Israel has a long history with the Law of Moses. There were times when Jews obeyed the Law and times when they didn't. There were times when they forgot about the Law and times when they remembered the Law. One example is when the Law was rediscovered during the reign of King Josiah.

“Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.’ And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, ‘Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the LORD.’ Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, ‘Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read it before the king. Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, ‘Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to

do according to all that is written concerning us.” 2 Kings 22:8-13

Rediscovering the written Law of Moses sometimes led to a revival in Israel. People recognized it as the written Word of God and it shook them to their core – as well it should.

In the next part of our study, *Can I Trust The Bible*, we'll look at what proof we have that the Old Testament in use by Christians today is the same as the original writings of Moses and the Prophets.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 4

Apprenticeship for **rightly dividing the Word of Truth** begins when God chooses you.

“For many are called, but few are chosen.” Matthew 22:14

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” Ephesians 1:3-4

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

Salvation means apprenticeship to everything Christ teaches: “... *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*” (Matthew 28:20) It means growing in our knowledge and understanding of Christ: *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what*

are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.” (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Every Christian is an apprentice to Jesus Christ. Learning how to rightly divide the Word of Truth is foundational to our training. *“I have given them Your word ... Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”* (John 17:14,17) The verb “sanctify” (*hagioson*) means “to set apart for holy use, sacred service.” Jesus knew that what would set His disciples apart from everything worldly and unholy would be the Holy Spirit using the Holy Word in their lives.

What does it mean to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ who rightly divides the Word of Truth? Jesus called His disciples personally and they followed Him and learned of Him. The Apostle Paul preached God’s Word and told those who believed that they followed both him and the Lord: *“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.”* (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7) Paul even went so far as to say that believers should follow his teachings and his life: *“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured.”* (2 Timothy 3:10-11) That’s what a master craftsman should be able to say to apprentices and journeymen.

The first lesson we learn as followers of Christ is the importance of God's Word to our apprenticeship. It is **vital, central,** and **foundational** to everything we believe and do. What did Jesus do when Satan tempted Him in the desert? He quoted the Word. Here are the Lord's responses from Matthew 4.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

"You shall not tempt the LORD your God."

"You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve."

When I first read that years ago, I remember thinking that if the Son of God relied on His Word to deal with Satan, I needed to rely on it even more. That means knowing it. I can't use something I don't know and I can't use it correctly unless I learn how to rightly divide it. Think of the Word of God as a Holy Tool in our hands. God gave us His Spirit and His Word to make a difference in our world. Learning how to divide the Bible correctly is important to our ability to do that. Right division begins with a simple step: read and study the Bible **in context**. In the next part of our study, *Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth*, we'll learn what that means and how to do it consistently in our study of God's Word.

Can I Trust The Bible 5

Moses wrote the first five Books of the Bible (Genesis – Deuteronomy) during the 15th century BC as the nation of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years. That was plenty of time for Moses to meet with God and receive all the information we now read in what's known as the Torah (Hebrew) and Pentateuch (Greek). We've already seen that Jesus quoted from those Writings and credited Moses as the author, but how do we know that what we have in our Bible today is what Jesus read during His Ministry in Israel?

The oldest complete Hebrew Bible we have is from the 10th century AD. Fragments of the Hebrew Bible exist from as far back as the 6th century BC, with the largest group from the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered in 1947 AD and date from the 1st century BC. The oldest Greek texts of the Old Testament we have are from the 2nd century BC. What may be most important in all of this evidence is the accuracy of the texts through the centuries. Biblical scholars compared the Dead Sea Scrolls from the 1st century BC with the Masoretic texts from the 10th century AD. The words were almost identical and minor differences in spelling or usage produced no change in meaning. This demonstrates that the Hebrew text Jesus read from when He was on earth in the 1st century AD is the same as the Hebrew text used to translate the Old Testament into our language today.

One reason for this is the commitment Hebrew scribes and copyists have had for the Word of God for thousands of years. They had a “high view” of Scripture – meaning they believed it contained the Spoken Words of God and should be treated with great reverence and care in copying. Another reason is that God intended that His Word would be protected from generation to generation. Jesus gave the people of Israel some insight into that when He told them - *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”* (Matthew 5:17-18) The Bible is a “supernatural” Book and has supernatural protection.

The history of ancient Israel is somewhat chaotic (to say the least), so there are questions about what happened to the Writings of the Old Testament during that chaos. We know that during Israel’s “golden period,” King David and his son Solomon had accurate copies of the Law of Moses, Joshua and Judges. Though the author of Judges is unknown, many scholars believe God revealed it to Samuel who was the last judge of Israel. Samuel was also a prophet, priest and kingmaker. God used Samuel to select David to become Israel’s king and would have confirmed to David what God had revealed to him about Israel’s history. David would have known what was true because of his own prophetic relationship with God. Here’s what David thought about the Scriptures he held in his hands.

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.”

Psalm 19:7-11

God Spoke through prophets for centuries to call His people back to Him. In our next study, *Can I Trust The Bible*, we'll see how God kept His Word pure through the amazing prophets of Israel.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 5

Has anyone ever taken what you said or wrote **out of context**? How did that make you feel? Did you want to set the record straight? It's happened to me many times through the years as reporters interviewed me for different stories. Since I am also a journalist, I was sensitive to how they handled my information and quotes. I learned first hand what it's like to be misquoted and have information I shared with the reporter be taken out of context. That led to people misunderstanding my thoughts about issues or events. Even though what I told the reporters was the truth, taking my comments out of context gave a false impression of what I believed and had said.

People do that with the Bible all the time. They misrepresent what God says by taking His Words out of context, which leaves a false impression about Him and what He thinks, feels, and wants. Rightly dividing the Word of Truth begins with contextual study techniques. It takes time and effort, but the results are worth it when we understand what God is really saying. That is how we become "a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

Contextual Study Techniques

1. Pray that God will guide your mind and heart as you study His Word. *"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am*

also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.”
(Colossians 4:2-4)

2. Start at the beginning. If you’re studying the Book of Romans, begin by reading the first sentence – Romans 1:1-4. Don’t try to understand the meaning of a statement until you’ve studied everything leading up to it. You may have a strong interest in understanding what Romans 9:13 means, (*“As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’*”), but trying to interpret it out of context can lead to many wrong ideas about what God means. If you rightly divide the Word of Truth beginning at Romans 1:1, you will be able to rightly divide Romans 9:13.

3. Look at each word in every sentence, carefully – *“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”* That’s almost 70 words, which is a long sentence. It will take a lot of study to fully understand the amazing Truth you’re reading.

4. Write down all your observations before trying to interpret what you’re reading.

The letter begins with the name Paul. Paul is the only person mentioned in this first sentence. Paul is a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Paul was called to be an apostle. Paul was separated to the

gospel of God. God promised the gospel through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures. The gospel concerns God's Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our Lord. Paul used the name Jesus Christ twice in this first sentence. Paul added the title "our Lord" in the second usage of His Name. Paul wrote that Jesus Christ was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness and by the resurrection from the dead. This sentence is almost 70 words in length.

This is similar to what I learned during my first few years as a journalist. I needed to cover every story by seeing everything that could be seen and writing down everything I could write down and capture on tape and film. I learned that I had to be careful about coming to conclusions before carefully seeing everything I could possibly see and asking as many questions as I could possibly ask. Only after I had done my work as a journalist could I report with certainty what was true about a story.

It is similar with Bible study. If you rush or skip the observation phase of Bible study, if you don't write down everything you see, if you don't ask all the right questions for interpretation, you will miss keys to understanding the great Truths God has built into His Word. Observation is the first step to "rightly dividing" the Word of Truth.

In our next study, Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth, we'll begin the interpretation phase of Bible study.

Can I Trust The Bible 6

What happened to copies of the Writings of Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David and Solomon during Israel's darkest hours? It's an important question to be answered. If the accurate copies disappeared during the chaos of centuries of upheaval, how can we trust that what we read in our Bible today is truly the Word of God? We know that Jesus confirmed the accuracy of the copies of the Old Testament when He taught from them in Israel, and that's enough for me, but that's not the only evidence. We also have the Prophets.

The united Kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms soon after King Solomon died. 10 of the 12 tribes established what became known as Israel or Ephraim (the most influential of the 10 tribes) with Samaria as its capital city. The other two tribes established what became known as Judah with Jerusalem as its capital city. Jeroboam became king of Israel and led the 10 tribes into idolatry to keep them from returning to worship the True God in Jerusalem. Israel continued to be unfaithful to God until its destruction at the hands of the Assyrian invaders about 722 BC. Here's how the writer of Kings recorded the sad end of Israel.

“So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass

through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone ... For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.” 2 Kings 17:16-18, 22-23

The children of Israel would never return to their land. The king of Assyria brought people from other nations and placed them in the former cities of Israel. The land became known as Samaria and was the habitation of Gentiles.

The Kingdom of Judah was not far behind Israel. The people continued to rebel against God even though they saw what had happened to Israel. God used the Babylonians to destroy the city of Jerusalem and the Temple about 586 BC and take many of the people captive. The difference between Judah and Israel is that God protected Judah and Jerusalem from permanent destruction and returned some of His people from captivity to rebuild the city and the Temple beginning in 538 BC.

The Hebrew word for “prophet” comes from a root word that means “speak.” Prophets were people called to “speak” for God. We get an insight to how God worked with prophets when Moses prophesied about God raising up a future Prophet (Jesus) like him from the people of Israel – *“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”* (Deuteronomy 18:18) That is one reason the Bible is called the “Word” of God because He **Spoke** through prophets. God placed His Words in their mouths and they spoke what He commanded them to speak. That is difficult for many people to understand today because they have not heard God Speak, but that’s one of the ways He communicated with the men and women He chose for prophetic ministries. It’s also one of the ways God protected the integrity of His Written Word during the chaotic years of Israel and Judah’s rebellion.

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’— when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Deuteronomy 18:20-22

God set the bar very high for how people would know whether a prophet was true or false. If what the prophet said did not happen or come to pass, *“that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken.”* We’ll see how important that was to the protection of the Written Word of God in the next part of our study, *Can I Trust The Bible.*

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 6

Contextual Study Techniques

Here's a quick review of what we looked at in our last study.

1. Pray that God will guide your mind and heart as you study His Word.
2. Start at the beginning.
3. Look at each word in every sentence, carefully.
4. Write down all your observations before trying to interpret what you're reading.

Now, to the interpretation of what you've read using Romans 1:1-4 as an example.

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

5. Ask insightful questions for interpretation. Careful observation of Romans 1:1-4 should raise many questions. Here are some interpretive questions from verse 1:

Who is Paul?

What language did he use to write this letter?

Why did he start his letter with just his name? Did he have a last name?

Didn't I read somewhere else that Paul's name was Saul? Why did he use Paul instead of Saul in this letter?

Was that the usual way people opened their personal letters centuries ago?

Did Paul do that in his other letters? If not, why not?

Is there anything significant about his using just his first name to start the letter?

What does the word "bondservant" mean in the language Paul used to write this letter?

Is there anything special about Paul using that word instead of other words that are translated "bondservant?" If so, what's special about it?

What was a bondservant's relationship to the people they served?

What does it mean to be a “bondservant” of Jesus Christ?

Is being a bondservant of Christ a good thing?

Does Jesus want everyone to be a bondservant or just Paul?

Did Paul always begin his letters by identifying himself as a bondservant? If so, why? If not, why not?

Why did Paul use both of the Lord’s names at the beginning of the letter – Jesus Christ? Why not use just one of them?

What does the word “called” mean in the language Paul used to write his letter?

Is there anything special about Paul using that word instead of other words that are translated “called?”

Did the word hold any special meaning for people who received Paul’s letter?

What does the word “apostle” mean in the language Paul used to write his letter?

Is there anything special about Paul using that word instead of other words that are translated “apostle?”

Did the word hold any special meaning for the people who received Paul's letter?

If so, what was the meaning?

When did Paul become an apostle?

Did Paul always begin his letters by identifying himself as an apostle?

If so, what's significant about that?

Was Paul the only apostle mentioned in the Bible?

If not, is there anything different about Paul's apostleship compared to other apostles?

What does the word "separated" mean in the language Paul used to write his letter?

Is there anything special about Paul using that word instead of other words that are translated "separated?"

Did the word hold any special meaning for the people who received Paul's letter?

What does the word "gospel" mean in the language Paul used to write his letter?

Is there anything special about Paul using that word instead of other words that are translated “gospel?”

Did the word hold any special meaning for the people who received Paul’s letter?

If so, what was the meaning?

What is the “gospel of God?”

Is that gospel different than other gospels in the Bible?

What does it mean to be “separated to the gospel of God?”

We could ask many more questions from Romans 1:1, but these give us a good place to begin in our interpretation. In our next study, we will take the next step in “rightly dividing the Word of Truth.”

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