

The Harmony of the Scriptures

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 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 Peter 1:19-21)

One of the greatest things ever taught to me in my early ministry by my elder brethren in the Lord was that the scripture must interpret itself. Older brethren continuously encouraged younger ministers to “harmonize” scripture. Harmony is defined as “a setting together, a closure or seam, agreement, concert, to fit or adapt, to square, Concord; agreement; accordance in facts” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary).

In 2 Peter 1:19 Peter encouraged God’s people to take heed unto the “more sure word of prophecy” that he was delivering to them. He described it as a light that shines in a dark place and advised them to take heed unto it until the “day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.” Peter had a great burden and desire for God’s people to know and understand the Word of God. God had shown him that his death was near and he expressed his desire that after his death that they would always have these things in their remembrance; *“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 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 Peter 1:12-21). One of the challenges for the early church and for the church today is to have a correct *understanding* of the scriptures. Paul instructed Timothy to *“Study (be diligent, earnest or eager) to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15). “Rightly divide” in 2 Timothy 2:15 is translated from the Greek word *orthotoméō*. *Orthotoméō* comes from two other Greek words, *orthós*, right and *témnō*, to cut or divide and means to correctly teach the word of truth by handling skillfully or correctly. Strong said it means to “to make a straight cut, that is, to dissect correctly”. Handling the word of God unskillfully and dividing His word in a manner other than God purposed results in false teaching. False teaching weakens churches, causes confusion and division, stunts spiritual growth, and leads people away from God and into darkness. The Bible teaches us the mechanism that God placed in His church for instructing his people; *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted*

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by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:11-16). God called preachers and teachers have a great responsibility to "rightly divide" or correctly teach the His word! The psalmist David said this; "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalms 119:105) The only light that can illuminate the heart of the unsaved and the path of the God's people is the holy word of God and it rightly divided!

In Nehemiah 8:8 speaking of Ezra and the priests of God the Bible says "*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*" (Nehemiah 8:8). The need for sound, Holy Spirit led biblical teaching is great today. Preachers and teachers must do as Ezra and "give the sense" so that people can understand the word of God when it is taught. In order to be able to "give the sense" or meaning, the preacher or teacher must first have a personal understanding of "what thus sayeth the word of the Lord." How we arrive at that understanding is very important! Many helps, commentaries and books have been written in years gone by and many more are being written today. With the vast access that this generation has to information, many people are turning to the internet and other resources for their interpretation of God's word. While writings of other men can certainly be of aid to us in our study of God's Word, these writings must be confirmed by scripture! We must not lean on them so heavily that we believe them and take up a position without having our position confirmed by the Holy Spirit! In all of our study, God MUST be our teacher on a personal level. I thank God for the men of God that taught me in the word and took the time to spend with me in my study of the word. But, the one thing that ALL of them left with me was, that I should not believe it because they said it, but because GOD had given me the understanding. I am thankful I was taught not to trust the teacher, but to look to the almighty God who wrote the blessed scriptures. I fear that easy access to the vast pool of information in the world today may cause God's people to move away from a prayerful, diligent and Holy Spirit led study of the word of God. God's people need discernment to be able to identify truth from error and this discernment only comes from God himself. There are many preachers and teachers available at the click of a mouse, but be assured that NONE of them are the author of the Holy Scriptures! Your pastor, preacher or teacher that may stand before you each Sunday is not the author of the word of God! Ultimately, we are all individually responsible to our Lord for our interpretation of his word. How great is our responsibility as we preach and teach God's truth that we express to the people the true meaning of the holy word. Paul told the Philippian church that they were to shine as lights in the world, "holding forth the word of LIFE" (Philippians 2:15-16). Be sure that God who has called us and assigned us this great task is also judging our words and the manner with which we speak them, AS WE SPEAK THEM. God is holding us accountable for every word that we speak! Jesus said " *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment*" (Matthew 12:36). This great task is not a game and is not to be taken lightly. I personally do not believe that pranks and jokes are appropriate when preaching, teaching or even discussing the word of God. There may be times when an analogy we may use to help someone understand God's word may be humorous, but we should never purposefully or intentionally mislead anyone as to what we believe the holy word of God to teach for the sake of humor or jesting. Paul told the Ephesian church that jesting which was not convenient was not to be "once named among you" (Ephesians 5:3-4). We are to express the meaning of God's word CLEARLY, from an honest and sincere heart that our hearers may know the God that lives within us! Paul said this: "*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*" (2 Corinthians 4:1-2). Also, the preaching and teaching of God's word is never to be a competition between brethren. Its purpose is never to place the preacher or teacher in a place *above* his brethren. Paul said this; "*For*

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though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16) We **MUST** look to him for direction as we study and prepare to deliver his word, for he is the author of it! Paul was so concerned about how he delivered the word of the Lord he made this statement to the church at Corinth; *"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."* (1 Corinthians 1:17) The Greek word *kenóō* translated "should be made of none effect" simply means to make empty or void. If Paul was concerned that he could make the word of God empty or void, we should bear the same concern today!

When Peter advised God's people to "take heed" to the word, he also said this: *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation"*. The word private in this verse means "pertaining to one's self" and the word interpretation means "explanation." This means that the source of the understanding of the word of God does not come from ourselves. Even the prophets of old did not understand their own prophecies many times; *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"* (1 Peter 1:10-11). The disciples on many occasions did not understand Jesus' teaching. They would ask him to "declare unto us"; *"Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field"* (Matthew 13:36). Peter went on to explain in verse 21, *"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"*. So, if the Holy Ghost moved upon holy men of old to speak, would it not make common sense that when we need to understand the word of the Lord that we need to consult the Holy Ghost? Jesus told his disciples: *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you"* (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit will not contradict himself by giving a meaning that is different than what he has already said. Therefore, we are not entitled to our own private interpretation of the word of the Lord, but we are to seek out the truth and the sense that God intended when he inspired his holy word. The only way that we are able to do that is by prayerful meditation and study of the word, calling upon the Lord to guide our study and to give us the correct understanding. The Bible interpreter must consult the Holy Ghost REGARDLESS of the commentaries, helps and aids provided of men regardless of who they are. *"Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged"* (Romans 3:4). Our God holds the key to all truth.

Peter also wrote in his second epistle concerning those who "torture" the scriptures; *"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest (torture or twist), as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness"* (2 Peter 3:15-17). Peter was writing concerning the doctrines of Christ, as did Paul in his epistles. There were those who were torturing or twisting the writings of Paul and the OT scriptures concerning Christ, as many do today concerning many of his teachings. We are not allowed the privilege to torture or twist the scriptures to suit our own interpretation. Remember, *"No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation"*. It is our responsibility to study to understand God's meaning of his Holy Word. When we torture the scriptures we are no different than those in Peter's day, we do so to our own destruction and detriment. Peter instructed God's people not to be led away with the error of the wicked and to fall from their own steadfastness. Peter was concerned that

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God's people could be deceived in their study of "things hard to be understood" by those who were torturing the scriptures. We must realize that the possibility exists that we can be deceived by false teachers. Jesus said this; "For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:22). Even well meaning, well respected, God fearing preachers and teachers can lead people astray by preaching or teaching a wrong interpretation of God's word! No matter how great or notable a teacher or preacher may be, we are not to take their word for the interpretation of God's holy word.

(Side note: As Peter wrote regarding the writings of the Apostle Paul, notice how he confirms for us that Paul's writings were considered as "scripture" in verse sixteen. Did you see it? Peter spoke of the difficulty of understanding the writings of our beloved brother Paul and said that they which are unlearned and unstable were "wresting" the writings of Paul, "as they do the other scriptures." The scriptures teach us concerning themselves!)

So, how are we to "rightly divide the word of truth"? What is the best method of study? Should we throw away our commentaries, books and computers? I think not. These can be beneficial when used in conjunction with prayerful study and searching of the Word. However, one thing I believe and know in my heart is that the Bible is its own best interpreter! That is the title of this writing and the burden that is upon my heart. God has provided us with his Word! And in his word there is no disharmony! I fear today as we focus on dissecting each scripture, defining every word and determining the context of scripture, a danger exists. Bible students can become focused upon one scripture, one thought, one interpretation and not consult other scriptures for confirmation that their position or interpretation is in harmony with the Bible itself! Scripture interprets scripture. Any interpretation that does not have the harmony of the scriptures as its foundation will surely fall. Jesus told the Jews on one occasion, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." (John 5:39-40) We would do well to take the instruction that Jesus gave to the unbelieving Jews and apply it to our effort to understand his word! Search the scriptures! When Jesus walked with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-34) they were perplexed by the recent event of his death. Bear in mind that many of the disciples of the Lord in that day did not understand completely all of the things of the Lord even though they walked with him daily! As Jesus journeyed with them and their eyes were restrained that they did not recognize him, he engaged their conversation. "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27). Jesus chose to help his disciples by teaching them from Moses and all the prophets. Jesus expounded the scriptures to his disciples using multiple references from the scriptures themselves, teaching them the meaning of those scriptures in all things concerning him. There is no doubt that all the references that Jesus made were in complete harmony with one another as there is no contradiction in the Holy Word of God. How wonderful it must have been to walk with the Savior and hear him expound his own word! Even though we do not walk with him physically today, we still have the benefit of his teaching as we study and ponder his word! Jesus will teach us through the indwelling of his Holy Spirit within us, by the same scriptures he used to teach the Emmaus Road disciples! He will help us harmonize the scriptures!

This charge is for every child of God. It is not only for the preacher, the deacon and the Sunday School teacher. God's holy word is the guide book for all of God's people, for every situation or circumstance in our lives, in our families, in our churches and in the world! A right interpretation and understanding of God's holy word will never lead us in the wrong path!

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In closing, hear again the words of the Psalmist David in Psalms 119:103-106:

*“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. NUN. Thy word is a
lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep
thy righteous judgments”.*

*Written for his glory,
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