

# What Right Division Does And Does Not Mean

## By Arthur Watkins

***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***

One of the best ways to define what words mean is to eliminate what they do not mean. By seeing what words do not mean helps us to narrow their definition down so that they are easier to define. It's called the process of elimination. By a process of eliminating what words cannot possibly mean makes it easier for us to see what they truly mean.

The question of this article is: **What does rightly dividing the word of truth really mean?** We hear these words 100's of times in sermons and in books, but what do they mean? If you ask 10 people what these words mean you will probably get 10 different answers. With so many different definitions how can we get to the real meaning of these words? The best way to define right division is by eliminating what it cannot possibly mean. By doing so we can narrow it down and get its correct interpretation. But how can we do this? By the man who wrote these words. Paul wrote 2 Timothy 2:15 and by studying the **things he said and did** when he wrote these words, we can see what right division does and does not mean. Read that last sentence again.

It is obvious Paul would not do or say anything that contradicted what he wrote in 2 Timothy 2:15. When he said to rightly divide the word of truth he did not say or do anything that wrongly divided the word of truth. No one can accuse him of wrongly dividing the word of truth for what he said and did never contradicted 2 Timothy 2:15.

The following is a list of some of the things Paul said and did through out his ministry. **As you read them, keep in mind they were said and done by the man who said to rightly divide the word of truth.** If Paul did these things and said these things then we know they do not violate 2 Timothy 2:15. If these things are contrary to right division then Paul was a hypocrite because he said and did all these things at the same time he said to rightly divide the word of truth.

**Paul who said to rightly divide the word of truth:**

***Worked signs and wonders not only among the Jews, but even among the gentiles to get them to believe the gospel.***

See Romans 15:18-21

***Persuaded his converts to be baptized in water.***

See Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:30-34, Acts 18:7-8, Acts 19:1-5

***Was persecuted for preaching the resurrection hope of Israel.***

See Acts 26:6-8, Acts 28:20

***Preached and claimed the spiritual promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament.***

Romans 15:27

***Based church doctrine on the Old Testament scriptures.***

He quotes the Old Testament 150-200 times in his epistles. He uses the expression as it is written referring to the Old Testament 33 times in his epistles. He based at least 60 major church doctrines on the Old Testament. He said all scripture including the Old Testament is profitable for church doctrine in 2 Timothy 3:15-16.

***Preached what he calls "his gospel" from the Old Testament.***

1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Romans 1:1-4, Acts 26:22-23

***Always went to the Jew first because the promises were made to them.***

Romans 1:16, 9:4-5

***Taught gentiles that they are grafted into the good olive tree along with the Jews whom he calls the election of grace.***

Romans 11:5-6, 17-18

***Taught gentile believers they are now the seed of Abraham and heirs to the promises of Abraham.***

Galatians 3:29, Romans 4:11

***Preached the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the saints foretold by the Prophets in the Old Testament.***

Compare 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 with Isaiah 25:8-9, Hosea 13:14

***Preached the blessings and promises of the New Covenant being a minister of the New Covenant.***

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

***Based the doctrine of justification by faith without works on Genesis 15:1-6, and Habakkuk 2:4.***

Romans 4:1-5, Romans 1:16-17

***Based the doctrine of imputed righteousness by faith only on what David said in the Old Testament.***

Romans 4:6-8

***Kept the law of God and told the church to keep it.***

Romans 7:22, 25, Romans 13:8-10 (The moral commandments)

***Preached the kingdom of God that was originally promised to Israel as the inheritance of the church.***

Acts 26:18, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, Ephesians 5:5, Acts 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31.

***Observed the Lord's Supper which is a memorial of the New Testament and told the church to observe it till Jesus comes again.***

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

***Wrote epistles to the same church of God he persecuted before he was saved.***

Compare Galatians 1:13 with 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Acts 20:28.

***Commanded lost people to repent when they believed the gospel and to do works meet for repentance after they believed the gospel.***

Acts 17:30-31, Acts 20:21, Acts 26:19-20

***Instructed sinners to believe and call on the Lord and to confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus to be saved.***

Romans 10:9-14

***Warned Christians that God would chastise them for their sins if they did not judge and confess them.***

1 Corinthians 11:30-32, Hebrews 12:5-8

***Commanded the church to keep the ordinances he delivered to the church.***

1 Corinthians 11:1-2

***Declared that gentiles are no longer aliens from the commonwealth of Israel but are now one body with them.***

Ephesians 2:11-16

***Preached the heavenly city New Jerusalem as the mother and home of the church.***

Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 12:22-24

***Instructed Christians that Christ's coming to gather the church is not at hand but is preceded by a number of prophetic events.***

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

***Wrote there is one coming of Christ in the future not two or three.***

Ephesians 4:4, Hebrews 9:28, 1 Corinthians 15:22-25.

***Pronounced a curse on any man including the other apostles or angels from heaven who preached a gospel different from his.***

Galatians 1:5-9

***Declared that both he and Peter and the other apostles were justified by faith alone without the works of the law and rebuked Peter for not living up to it.***

Galatians 2:14-16

***Wrote that the church began when God made Christ the head of the body when he raised him from the dead and set him at his right in heavenly places in Acts 1, not 2, 9, 13, 18, or 28.***

Ephesians 1:20-23, Colossians 1:18 Mark 16:19.

***Taught that all believers are appointed to suffer tribulation and that tribulation will increase before the second coming of Christ.***

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, Acts 14:22, 2 Timothy 2:12, Philippians 1:29

***Wrote an epistle to the same Hebrews as Peter.***

2 Peter 3:15 with 1 Peter 2:9.

***Wrote epistles to the same church at Ephesus and Laodicea as John.***

Revelation 2:1 with Ephesians 1:1. Revelation 3:14 with Colossians 4:16

***Followed Christ's example and the doctrines he preached and practiced in the Four Gospels throughout his ministry.***

1 Corinthians 11:1

***Taught believers that certain rewards, crowns and blessings were conditional on good works and could be lost because of bad works.***

2 Corinthians 5:10-11, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Colossians 3:24-25

***Said the church is built upon the foundation of the New Testament Apostles and the Old Testament Prophets.***

Ephesians 2:20

***Declared that the mystery of Ephesians 3:6 is not the church, but that the gentiles are now fellowheirs with the Jews to their inheritance in the kingdom of God, members of the same body with them and partake of their promise and promises in Christ by faith alone in the gospel without works or circumcision.***

Ephesians 3:6

***Said the justification of heathen gentiles by faith alone was promised to Abraham.***

Galatians 3:8 with Genesis 22:18

***Said his ministry to bring light and salvation to the gentiles was prophesied by the prophets.***

See Isaiah 49:6 with Acts 13:47

***Proclaimed that he was not sent to start the church but to open the door of salvation to gentiles into the church.***

Acts 13:1-4 with Acts 14:25-28

***Preached Christ as the Great High Priest of the church.***

Hebrews 3:1

***Preached a present and future tense salvation.***

2 Timothy 1:9 with Romans 13:11

***Taught us that mystery does not exclude prophecy for many mysteries were concealed in the prophets and many prophecies were mysteries.***

For example compare Romans 16:25 with 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Compare 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 with Isaiah 25:8-9, Hosea 13:14.

***Did not hack the Bible up and separate the books into pigeon holes and put up no trespassing signs on the books he did not write. He said all scripture is profitable for doctrine, all scripture is profitable for reproof, all scripture is profitable for correction and all scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness.***

2 Timothy 3:16

***Said that Christ preached to the gentiles in person and then by proxy through him. Paul carried out the gentile ministry of Christ.***

1 Timothy 3:16, Romans 15:8-16, Galatians 1:15-16, Acts 13:47 with Isaiah 49:6.

I have purposely picked these examples because many people today will accuse you of *wrongly dividing the word of truth* if you preach and practice these things. If that were true, Paul would be guilty of wrongly dividing the word of truth for he practiced and preached all these things and more. Therefore, those who practice or preach these things today do not wrongly divide the word of truth. The question is; what does it mean to rightly divide the word of truth?

## **CONTEXT - CONTEXT - CONTEXT**

The first law of Bible study is: Interpret every text from the context in which it is found. What does this mean? Pay attention to what is written BEFORE it and AFTER it. And when you interpret 2 Timothy 2:15 from the context in which it appears you will see it has nothing to do with the issues you have just read.

## 2 Timothy 2:14-18

**Verse 14** Of these things put *them* in remembrance, charging *them* before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, *but* to the subverting of the hearers.

**Verse 15** Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

**Verse 16** But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

**Verse 17** And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;

**Verse 18** Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

Notice that the command to rightly divide the word of truth in verse 15 is surrounded by a number of warnings about words.

The warning in verse 14 is a warning about striving about words of no profit and words that subvert the hearers. It's a warning about useless profitless and subversive words.

Notice the warning in verse 16 is about profane and vain babblings that are ungodly. It's a warning about profane, vain and ungodly words.

Notice the warning in verse 17 is about words that eat like a canker or a sore. It's a warning about cankerous words.

Notice the warning in verse 18 is about erring from the truth and teaching false doctrines about resurrection. It's a warning about errors and false doctrines that overthrow people's faith.

Right in the middle of all these warnings about subversive words, unprofitable words, profane words, vain words, babblings, ungodly words, cankerous words, lies and false doctrine is found the command to rightly divide the word of truth.

When something is divided it is separated from something else. In the context in which it appears we are to rightly divide and separate the word of truth from what?

Words of no profit that subvert people.

Profane and vain words and babblings that are ungodly.

Cankerous words that eat the souls and spirits of men.

Lies, errors and false doctrines that overthrow the faith of people.

In other words, it's a command to divide and separate the word of truth from lies and false doctrine. Why?

**Because every lie the devil ever told has an element of truth in it.**

For example read this statement carefully: ***Jesus Christ is the virgin born Son of God, who lived a sinless life and died on the cross for our sins and we can be saved by grace through faith and the grace by which we are saved is acquired by taking the 7 sacraments.***

What part of this statement is true and what part is false? The majority of this statement is the absolute truth. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. He did live a sinless life. He died for our sins. We can be saved by grace through faith. The part that is untrue and the most damning is the statement; *The grace by which we are saved is acquired by taking the 7 sacraments.* Those few words frustrate the grace of God and make the cross of Christ vain because it adds works to salvation. When we hear and read statements like this 2 Timothy 2:15 commands us to divide and separate the truth from lies and false doctrine. Lost people cannot divide and separate truth from lies and sad to say many Christians cannot either. It's up to us who know the truth to rightly divide the word of truth from the lies and false doctrines the devil mixes with the truth.

The devil always mixes his lies with truth to get people to swallow it. False doctrine is not always totally false. There is truth in many false doctrines and the truth is what hooks people into believing it. False doctrine is like rat poison. Rat poison is 99% good grain and only 1% poison. But the rat would not eat it without the good grain. So it is with the lies and false doctrines of the devil. There is always an element of truth in false doctrine and it's up to us who know the truth to separate the truth from the lies.

***That's the definition of 2 Timothy 2:15 from the context in which it appears.***

It is wrong to take a verse out of its context and make it say something different from its context. By interpreting 2 Timothy 2:15 in its context we

can see that it has nothing to do with the issues I have listed in this article. It has nothing to do with many of the definitions that men have given it through the years. God alone knows how many doctrines and systems of theology have been built upon 2 Timothy 2:15 that are totally foreign to its context!

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Additional notes: We know from I Corinthians 13 that the sign gifts have vanished away, but Paul throughout his ministry worked signs and wonders. This shows that what he wrote about right division has nothing to do with signs and wonders. At the same time Paul worked signs and wonders he also said to rightly divide the word of truth.

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