

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD

[Note by James Bruggeman: The following article comes from a magazine called *Unsearchable Riches*, bound Volume 1, 1909-1910. The magazine was edited by Adolph E. Knoch and Vladimir Gelesnoff. Those affiliated with this group were strong proponents of universal reconciliation; however, as the article will show, they were not given to understand the Christian Israel identity message. Nonetheless, the article is worth pondering for its nuggets of precious truth. The actual author is not noted in the bound volume.]

We have the fullest faith that the Bible is a direct revelation from God to man, and that therefore a careful study of its contents is the imperative duty and life work of *all* Christians. We have not been veered in the least by the terrific din of battle waging around the question of its genuineness and inspiration between the orthodox defenders on the one side and the *literati* of the critical school on the other.

We hold that the Person of Christ, that wonderful Personage utterly separated from all others, and utterly unlike them in its totality, while akin to God and man in its duality—a Personage whose absolute deity is emphatically attested in both Testaments, and shines forth in gleams of light through every word and act of His earthly life, is the final answer to all such disputes. Our position may be thought narrow, but it is so only because we take Christ at His word, and are more willing to be "narrow" and "out-of-date" with it than to be "broad" and "up-to-date" without it.

It is unjust to accuse a man of being narrow, because he takes a person of undisputed integrity strictly at his word; and if Christ has definitely expressed Himself on the inspiration and authorship of the Pentateuch, and on the strength of the accredited facts of His sinless humanity and absolute deity, we take His statement as authoritative, are we therefore narrow?

Is a man narrow because in a dispute where incalculable temporal and eternal interests tremble in the balance—a dispute in which literary adepts and scientific pedants have, without sufficient warrant, preferred against the Bible grave indictments of untruth, which a more accurate knowledge of ancient history has proved to be unfounded—he refuses, in view of such glaring incompetency in dealing with facts displayed by the assailants of the Bible, to commit himself to the paralogism, and accept the conclusions of a vicious criticism that stands convicted before the bar of evidence, and adheres, for want of better evidence, to the mighty teachings of the Book whose veracity has—thus far at least—been vindicated and confirmed by every fresh discovery? We think not.

We are profoundly convinced, that in the present strained condition of affairs, a prayerful, humble meditation of our Lord's lowly journey from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross,—with a sincere desire to know the truth, and a heart honest enough to receive it, —will effectually banish the doubts which a crass criticism has created in the minds of many; while bulky tomes of brainy discussion and pointed argument are apt to evoke more smoke than light, and form in the hearts of anxious readers as many clouds as they assist in dispelling.

When God wanted to teach backsliding Israel the relations that should exist between Himself and the recipients of His grace. He set them forth under the figure of a lump of pliable clay moulded freely by the potter's hand (Jer. xviii: 16). This is the ideal attitude. Every Christian should be unreservedly yielded to God; not in the spirit of unconcerned, passive resignation to the inevitable, but of an intelligent and affectionate response to God's benevolent will. It is this element of elasticity that makes life useful, vigorous, robust; and endows service of that permanency which insures its enduring the ordeal of that day, "when the fire will prove each man's work of what sort it is (I Cor. iii: 12-14). When that element of elasticity evaporates, spiritual vitality is sapped by earthly influences, and service is reduced to a mere mechanical repetition of lifeless forms and worn-out creeds.

Again; it is the lack of this elasticity that lures God's people out of the narrow path of separation, and compels the

Father to take in hand the chastening rod and inflict faithful wounds calculated to bring them back to their senses and spare them the self-inflicted sorrows of disobedience. Balaam and David persisted in a course of overt disobedience to God's plain injunctions, and were allowed to carry out the designs upon which their hearts were set, but they involved themselves in calamitous consequences, and had to learn from bitter experience what would have been their happy prerogative to learn in communion with God. Our fear should be, lest, being chastened of the Lord, we should fail to assimilate the lessons which His scourging designed to administer, and smart under its lashes without reaping the peaceful fruit of righteousness, which the scourging yields to those that have been exercised thereby.

God's judicial administration is fraught with mercy. The darkest clouds are not without silvery linings. To know this truth is to possess the secret of blessedness;

to remember it when flesh and heart are failing, and the black air begins to hurtle with the darts of the enemy, is to let the Almighty hand clasp ours and guide us through the narrow path strewn with the snares of the devil, artfully concealed in the gloom that thickens around us. Delusion is the devil's *forte* in this age, and we must take care not to escape its grosser forms and become a prey to the more subtle. Wielding our weapons against those who—under the specious pretense of scholarship, and in the witchery of modern style—seek to smother all spiritual life, our apprehension should be, lest, devoting our energies to obstruct their progress, we should fail to learn some needy lesson which may have been brought to our attention by means of these attacks. It is to be feared that an unwonted amount of time and talent is expended in joining issue with the opponents and critics of the Bible that might be employed to better advantage.

The popularity of destructive movements is always evanescent, and their achieved successes are short-lived. Some movements, like some characters, appear to best advantage at a distance. Sensationalism invests them with a false halo which enhances for a time their superficial attractions and conceals their defects; but which disappears after the first desire for novelty has been gratified. Looked at

from a distance, criticism possesses, like these characters, a beauty which fades away on closer acquaintance. It does not belong to what botanists describe as an endogen, an exogen, or an acrogen; neither growing internally by assimilation of truth, nor externally by propagation of life, nor upwards by increasing spirituality. A feeble exotic, dependent upon an artificial hot-house atmosphere for its very existence, it is the very antipode of faith, which, like a stately oak, may cast off its leaves for a time, but only to put them on again with returning spring, or to the perennial pines and evergreens which dare the winter frosts and snows.

Deflection from God's path exposes the saints to Satan's attacks: and he is not slow to take advantage of such welcome opportunities and utilize them to the best of his ability. But in God's hands, let it be stated for the sake of comfort, Satan is a powerful agent in carrying out God's disciplinary plans; and when, as in the case of Job and Peter, His people are permitted to fall into his hands. and experience the influence of his mighty spells, it is only for the purpose of diverting them from hidden shoals and lead them to a closer walk with God. Satan's malignity, and the magnificent results which the wisdom of God accomplishes through its medium, remind one of the painter, who, actuated by jealousy, flung a sponge at the canvas of his rival, intending to obliterate the scene, but producing by the merest accident the very effect which the artist's utmost efforts had failed to secure. God's purposes are at times born in obscurity, but the very gloom from which they emerge heightens the aftereffect.

We will now proceed to study several Scriptures on the subject of the Word.

In a discourse to His disciples Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one cometh unto the Father but by me." (Jno. xiv: 8.)

In His intercessory prayer, lifting up His eyes to Heaven, He breathed the petition: "Sanctify them in the truth: Thy word is truth." (Jno. xvii: 17.)

In the course of a conversation with the Jews, Jesus said to those who had believed Him: "If ye abide in my word, ye are truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the

truth shall make you free." (Jno. viii: 32.)

One of the last words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy was: "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. ii: 15.)

Having brought these passages together, we must arrange them in logical order and emphasize the leading thought in each.

"I am the truth." . . . "Thy word is truth." "The truth shall make you free." . . . "Rightly dividing the word of truth." Thus read together, we perceive at a glance that these Scriptures are interlaced by the usage of the word *truth*.

The first of the above adduced texts speaks of Him Who is the essence and source of truth—our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Scriptures testify of me."

The second text indicates the medium by which truth, of which the Person of Christ is the living embodiment, is communicated to mortals. "No one knows the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him" (Matt. xi: 27). God's chosen instrument to reveal to mortals the person of His Son is the written Word. Thus the written Word of God, being- a presentation of His Person—a portrait of the living Truth expressed in inanimate words—is, and of necessity must be, the truth. While in a sense it is perfectly true that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (yet *only* in a sense, since the passage in question has no reference whatever to the subject to the support of which it is perpetually adduced); yet the fact remains, that *the Spirit needs the vehicle of the letter*, and for the cultivation of the spirit enjoined, we must come to know the letter enjoining. The light is the essential thing, but it needs a lightholder of some kind; and it is impossible to destroy the lamp without extinguishing the light; for it is very difficult to know just where the gold of the lamp and the glory of the light divide, so strange and splendid is the merging. Christ is the light (Jno. viii: 12), the written Word is the God-made lamp, and it will be found, like all the works of God, to be perfect in form, as well as in truth. All God's works are perfect; and His Word being the greatest of His works, we must look for and expect perfection there.

The literary form is as perfect as its truth.

The third passage sets forth the object which the truth aims to accomplish. Its chief and foremost design is to free God's people from the blighting influences of the world; that, being purged from all unrighteousness, they may become unobstructed channels through which streams of blessing may flow.

Hosea's complaint, "My people perish for lack of knowledge" unveils the cause to which a low and carnal state of the people of God is always attributable. For the time being, God's supreme concern is the growth of the Body, the Church; and *knowledge of the truth* is the ordained means to attain that end. "Ye shall *know* the truth, and the truth *shall* make you free." "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye *may grow* thereby." (I Pet. ii: 2.) Truth is the foundation and source of practice ; while true practice is the outcome of truth received and obeyed. Holy life, apart from knowledge of God's Word, is no more possible than the raising of wheat without sowing the seed.

This fact is most conspicuous in Christ's promises of the Paraclete. The first promise is, "He shall *guide* you into all the truth" (Jno. xvi: 13); the last, "Ye shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts i: 8). Truth and power are related to each other, as to order and importance, as cause is to effect. Truth is the cause, power the effect. But today Christians are attempting to reverse this order; they want power without truth, and while all sorts of contrivances are resorted to to obtain the former, the latter is often ignored. The religious press pours forth a daily stream of books on the subject of power, which, in the majority of cases, lay but little stress on God's revealed purposes.

It is a mistake to exalt faith above the Word. Faith can only operate along the line of the Spirit's work, indicated in the Word, and as it is His work to guide us into all the truth, it follows that the sphere of faith's operations will be enlarged or restricted in proportion as the truth is accorded its rightful place.

The saint needs to "know the things freely given unto us of God" (i Cor. ii: 12). The burden of Paul's prayers was "that

we, having the eyes of our heart enlightened, may *know* what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe . . . that we may know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled in all the fulness of God" (Eph. i: 18; iii: 19).

The soul's first concern should be to seek—knocking persistently at God's door of revelation—a disclosure of the inheritance of the saints in light. When the portals of God's treasure-house are flung open and a vision vouchsafed, the enraptured eye catches a glimpse of the divine path and the will is energized to walk in it. In 2 Tim. iii: 15, having stated the inspiration of the entire collection of sacred writings, and its component parts, the apostle points to the Word of Truth as God's provision for the perfecting of character and equipment for service. "Virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, love of the brethren, love (2 Pet. ii: 1-5) is an unveiling of present possibilities, and, when these are known, faith adds them to its possessions.

The fourth text is a direction for using the truth so that it may accomplish the design for which it was given. The Word of God is likened to a sword (Eph. vi: 17; Heb. iv: 12). Now the warrior must be skilled in wielding weapons, else, instead of reducing the adversary to submission, he will inflict injury to himself.

The great requirement in dealing out the Word is that it should be "rightly divided," or properly apportioned.

The meaning of this injunction is not far to seek. God's dealings with mankind group themselves into a series of ages. These must be carefully distinguished by apportioning to each the particular truths which God associates with it. Each age bears three distinctly marked features: it begins in divine promise and mercy, proceeds in human sin and apostasy, and ends in the judgment of the wicked and the deliverance of the righteous; exalting God and debasing man. But beyond these common features, the ages vary considerably as to character and aim. Each failure on the part of man is followed by an act of Divine intervention, inaugurating a new departure and revealing new phases of His variegated wisdom.

If, then, God has from time to time introduced new methods of dealing with man and made different arrangements for the administration of affairs, is it not clear, without any argument, that it is impossible to introduce the principles and standards of one age into another without dislocating the whole body of revealed truth and involve it into inextricable confusion.

If this simple principle was as readily recognized, and acted upon, in the study of the Bible as it is in daily affairs, many bewildering perplexities would vanish.

The civil war abolished slavery. Therefore the statement of its existence in the commonwealth is either true or false according as it associated with the right or wrong period of American history. The statement of the same fact which is true in one connection becomes untrue in another.

Take another example. At one time Canada was a French colony and was ruled by French law. Then it passed into the hands of Great Britain. With the change of sovereignty there came of necessity a change also of administration. The transition of sovereignty rendered the former code of the Dominion obsolete, and replaced it by another which henceforth was to regulate its proceedings. Therefore, it is apparent, for reasons too obvious to be named, that attempts to enforce French laws which were proper before the transition would be altogether out of place after it had taken place.

If a person unacquainted with history were to read a volume on Canada, he would take the truthfulness of the writer's description of the country for granted. But if he were to find, a few chapters further, a second description, which seemed to clash with the first, a difficulty would be created in his mind, and he would naturally question the writer's truthfulness. The difficulty, however, vanishes if the reader is informed that one description contemplates Canada under the French regime, the other under the English. Both descriptions are perfectly true when associated with the period present in the writer's mind. But, if the reader joins them together, and interprets them of the same time and the same circumstances, all truth vanishes, and he will involve himself in inextricable confusion. Hence, if we were called upon to examine a certain

document pertaining to the affairs of the Dominion, the first step toward its right understanding and interpretation would be to ascertain the period under which the document had been formulated. Details naturally fall into their proper place and are easily understood, once this point is conclusively established.

One characteristic feature from the Fall to the Deluge was restriction to vegetarian diet. After the Flood, God made a covenant with Noah, enunciated new principles, and introduced the use of animal flesh for food. Therefore, to enforce vegetarianism before the Deluge was to cooperate with God for the furtherance of His cause; to enforce it after the Deluge, meant to act in direct opposition to His revealed will.

The recognition of this simple principle is of tremendous importance. Divide the Scriptures properly, and the Bible becomes a harmonious unit; seek to "reconcile" the divisions, and the Bible reduces itself to a mass of discordant and conflicting statements.

Our complaint is not that the injunction to rightly divide the Word is not known, but that it has not received proper recognition. Theoretically it is recognized. Practically it is almost entirely ignored. Here is the source of the existing confusion. Here, too, is the opening wedge which will make a way out of it. The measure in which God's people can expect blessing is the measure in which they will grasp and apply this great principle and the degree of their willingness to adjust themselves in accordance therewith.

The majority of Christians do not know that *all* Scripture is *for us*, not all is *about* us. All Scripture is *for* the church's learning and profit, but not all Scripture is *about* the church. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written *for our learning*, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope." (Rom. xv: 4.) All Scripture is *for us* that we may learn of God's ways with men; that, grasping His method and end, we may have patience and hope in time of adversity; but not all Scripture is *about* our position, duty and hope as members of Christ's Body.

Two packages of letters are placed in my possession

with the request to read them. In reading the first batch I find myself at home. There are names of persons I have known, places which I have visited, and transactions in which I have taken part. In reading the second I experience difficulty, persons are mentioned whom I have not known, places are named which I have not visited, and transactions recorded in which I took no part. I am at a loss how to account for this fact. At last someone informs me that the first batch of letters was addressed *to me*; while the second was addressed to another party, but is placed in my possession that I may acquire the knowledge of many useful things. Just so, parts of Scripture are addressed to the nations, others to Israel, others again to the Church. In reading Scripture, then, our first endeavor is to ascertain to whom that particular portion is addressed and remember that what is spoken to Israel and the nations is subject in their application to ourselves to such modifications as the revelation concerning the Church necessitates.