

Lesson 16 - Understanding the Bible

Most people who look at Christianity today are bewildered by the multitude of denominations and doctrines. No wonder that so many are confused and unstable. Several have written books and given seminars on "How to interpret the Bible." However, many of these books and seminars change what the Bible really says to remove apparent contradictions such as those we studied in lesson 15. In doing this, they only add further to the confusion.

Rightly Dividing

The Bible is not so difficult to understand as many people think it is. The key to unlocking its riches is found in the Bible itself. "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). We can never understand the Bible unless we obey God and rightly divide His Word. What does it mean to rightly divide? The Greek word means to make a straight cut. We could think of a dressmaker cutting out pieces of cloth. Each piece of cloth must be properly cut and then placed in the appropriate place if the dress is to be a garment fit to wear. In the same way, we must rightly divide (or cut straight) the Word of God. Each portion must then be placed in the appropriate dispensation.

Divisions in Ephesians 2

Not only does God tell us to rightly divide, but also He gives us the divisions we should use. Ephesians 2:11 speaks of "time past"; Ephesians 2:13 tells about "now"; and Ephesians 2:7 looks to "the ages to come." Here, then, are three divisions in the Word of God:

- 1) time past;
- 2) but now; and
- 3) the ages to come.

Ephesians chapter two makes it clear that each of these three divisions is vastly different from the other two. Whenever we open the Bible, we must know if we are reading about "time past" or "now" or "the ages to come." Many Christians attempt to live their lives based on what God said to people in "time past" or to those who will live in "the ages to come." We can never honour the Lord Jesus Christ until we understand where to look in the Bible to find God's will for us today.

Divisions in Romans 5

Romans 5:13-14 designates a time as being from "Adam to Moses." We can also see in this chapter a time from Moses to Christ (law to grace) [see verses 13-16]. Finally, in Romans 5:21, we find the time when grace reigns (the time of Paul's gospel). Again, it is vital that we know if we are reading instructions for:

- 1) those living before the law (Adam to Moses);
- 2) those living under the law (Moses to Christ);
- 3) those living under grace (when grace reigns).

Divisions in Galatians 3

Galatians 3:17 refers to "the promise" given to Abraham; the same verse also mentions "the law" given to Moses 430 years later; verse 23 teaches about the time when "faith came" (the revelation given to Paul). We must know if the Scripture passage we are reading is part of:

- 1) "the promise" revealed to Abraham;
- 2) "the law" revealed to Moses;
- 3) the "faith" revealed to Paul.

The Foundational Division

Please read the following verses carefully, especially noting the Italics and underlining that I have added:

"As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Luke 1:70).

"Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21).

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25).

The first verse quoted above is found in Luke and the historical setting is near the time of the birth of Christ. The events of that time had been spoken of by the Old Testament prophets "since the world began." When we turn the pages in our Bibles from the Old Testament and begin to read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we must realise that this is a continuation of what the Old Testament prophets wrote.

In Acts chapter three we find the second verse we have quoted above. Historically the setting is shortly after the Day of Pentecost. The death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ had already taken place. All that had taken place was spoken of by the holy prophets "since the world began." Again, this was a continuation of what had been spoken of by the Old Testament prophets.

Our third verse is found in Romans. This verse refers to the "revelation of the mystery" which "was kept secret since the world began." This is undeniably different from what we read in Luke and Acts. It is impossible to keep something secret and yet at the same time have all the prophets speaking about it. Romans speak of a revelation that had previously been kept secret---unknown by any man.

The difference between "prophecy" and "the mystery" is the foundational division in the Bible. In the next several lessons we will study both prophecy and the mystery.

How to Understand the Bible

Why are there so many different denominations? Why are there so many different opinions about topics such as water baptism, speaking in tongues, the Sabbath, eternal security, etc.? It is because many do not obey 2 Timothy 2:15. They do not rightly divide the word of truth. The only way to understand the Bible is to study it according to the instructions given by God. Rightly dividing the word of truth will open the Word of God to our understanding in a wonderful way.

However, we must be willing to set aside the traditions of men and long-held denominational beliefs.

Review Questions Lesson 16 - Understanding the Bible

True or False

1. All of the denominations in Christianity are basically the same and equally pleasing to God.
2. There are no divisions in the Bible.
3. The promise given to Abraham and the law given to Moses are two of the divisions found in the Bible.
4. The book of Luke speaks of a mystery that was kept secret since the world began.

Multiple Choice

5. The revelation of the mystery:
 - a) is found in the Old Testament
 - b) was revealed to Adam
 - c) was kept secret since the world began
 - d) is explained in Matthew
6. There are many different denominations because:
 - a) God's will is that we worship him in the way that best fits our culture
 - b) many Christians do not rightly divide the word of truth
 - c) the Holy Spirit leads people to start different kinds of ministries
 - d) it is impossible to know for certain how to interpret the Bible
7. The Bible:
 - a) is extremely difficult to understand.
 - b) can only be understood if we go to seminary or Bible College.
 - c) can only be understood if we know Greek and Hebrew.
 - d) can be understood only if we rightly divide the word of truth.

Fill in the Blanks

8. Romans five teaches about a time from Adam to _____ .
9. "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been _____ "
(Luke 1:70).
10. The foundational division in the Bible is and the _____ .