

## Making Sense of

### Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15)

"*Rightly* dividing" is the key to Bible study. It allows us to understand and apply God's Word intelligently to our daily lives. Some say that dividing the Bible is wrong and should never be done. But this verse is not asking whether we should or should not divide the Bible. Rather it says that when we divide the Bible (and we will), do it *rightly*.

Dividing the subjects we study is not something new to us. Think back to high school English class. Remember diagramming sentences? I do. My teacher referred to it rather stuffily as "distinguishing the parts of speech." Do you know what that teacher was doing--she was rightly dividing sentences so that we could learn about the English language and use it better in our daily lives.

Or remember biology class. The first thing we learned was the classification system. And in chemistry we spent a lot of time following procedures that allowed us to separate distinct elements in a compound. How well we do all this, how well we "*rightly*" divide the subject matter, will determine whether or not we become approved workers who learn the material correctly and pass the course.

Dividing things--separating and distinguishing them, making distinctions

among them, comparing and contrasting them--is basic to how we study subjects and learn about them so that we can better understand the whole. And this is

how we will study God's Word and learn His coursework and gain an appreciation for what He is doing as well. Here in II Tim. 2:15 God tells us to divide *rightly* so that we can ace God's test, pass His course, and be His "approved workmen who need not be ashamed." But how do we *rightly* divide God's Word? The short answer is that we rightly divide the subject matter of God's Word when we divide it the same way He does. We divide *rightly* when we make the same distinctions in our study that He makes in His Word.

To see how this is done, let's take a broad overview of the Bible and find some of the most basic and fundamental distinctions God places in His Word. We will just skim over the surface and gather up the really easy ones. The ones that God has made so obvious and plain that they ought to form the basis of everyone's theology. They stand like boulders before us. They hang low on the trees along the path, ripe and ready for the picking.

### **THE HEAVENLY/EARTHLY DISTINCTION**

Let's start at the beginning, the very first verse in the Bible--Gen. 1:1: **In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.** Here God distinguishes between two spheres of activity--the heavenly and the earthly. This distinction impresses itself on us even more when we remember that the Bible not only opens by referring to the heavenly/earthly distinction, but closes by referring to it as well (the new heaven and the new earth--Rev. 21). God makes a fundamental distinction between His activity in

the heavenly realm and His activity in the earthly realm. Everything God reveals to mankind is encapsulated within the heavenly/earthly distinction. The whole Bible is placed within its context. This is an important distinction in God's Word, and it ought to be important to us as well.

As we continue reading in Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament, God focuses our attention on the earth. He promised Abraham a real land on the earth. God told Abraham to **Lift up thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed for ever.** And Abraham immediately walked through the land--**the length of it and the breadth of it**, recognizing that it belonged to him (Gen. 13:14-17).

David also looked forward to this earthly purpose of God when his people would be planted in the land promised to Abraham, and God would establish his Kingdom on earth (II Sam. 7:9-12). And all the later prophets spoke in anticipation of the fulfillment of this earthly purpose, prophesying of the time when God's dominion on the earth would stretch from **sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth** (Zech. 9:10).

So far, however, we have only spoken about God's purpose for the earthly realm. What about the heavenly realm? Where do we find God's heavenly purpose? The Apostle Paul says God gave him a message and a ministry that centers on God's purpose to make known **now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places...the manifold wisdom of God** (Eph. 3:10).

[More on Distinctions Next Time](#)

