

HANDLING GOD'S WORD

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God is the source of spiritual understanding (Prov 2:1-6; 2 Tim 2:7). But that understanding only comes by studying God's word (Psa 119:18,104,130,169; Eph 3:4; 2 Tim 2:7). To properly understand God's word, it is essential that we begin our study with the right heart and right motivation (Prov 2:1-6; 3:5; 9:6-9; John 7:17; Heb 11:6). And how we handle the word of God itself is extremely vital. There are several important principles that God teaches us to follow in order not to misunderstand His word.

Ceasing from our own understanding

Proverbs 3:5 says, "*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*" Proverbs 23:4 also tells us to cease from our own understanding. Along these same lines, 2 Peter 3:15-17 says, "*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, 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.*" The apostle Paul serves as an excellent example in properly handling God's word. "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (2 Cor 2:17). Paul was "*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 Cor 4:2).

Rightly dividing the word

After ceasing from our own understanding, and handling God's word with sincerity and not corruptly, we need to show ourselves approved unto God, "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim 2:15). Part of rightly dividing the word of truth requires recognition that the New Testament is the only religious law which governs man today. Jesus came to fulfill the Old Law (Matt 5:17), and did so (John 19:30). Therefore, on the mount of transfiguration, when Peter attempted to

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(continued)

put Christ on equal footing with Moses and Elijah, the Father made it clear that His Son's law was the only one to be followed. He said, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him*" (Matt 17:5). Christ said, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). The Old Testament should be studied and is for our learning (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:1-11), but the Old Testament *law* is no longer in force (Col 2:14; Gal 5:1-4). This discernment must be made in order to properly understand the scriptures.

Keeping the scriptures in their context

Another vital point to always keep in mind is that it is essential to keep all scriptures in their proper context to correctly understand God's word. This includes considering the remote context. As 1 Corinthians 2:13 instructs us, we must compare spiritual things with spiritual. This means that in order to understand the scriptures properly, we must consider all that God has said on every subject, not just part of what He says. In Matthew 4:5-7, the devil considered only part of what God said when he quoted scripture and misapplied it to tempt Jesus to leap from the pinnacle of the temple. But Jesus compared spiritual things with spiritual by considering all that God has said. Satan lifted one verse all by itself, ignored the rest of what God said. Jesus weighed all the scriptures, saying, "It is written *again*." Along these same lines, we must recognize that no scripture contradicts or disagrees with another scripture (1 Cor 14:33; 2 Tim 2:13). If God gave contradictory information and commandments, He would be divided against Himself and His house would not stand (Mark 3:24-25). In addition to the remote context, the immediate context must also be studied carefully, including the context of who is being spoken to and to whom it applies. Verb tenses (Matt 22:32), singulars and plurals (Gal 3:15-16), etc. are all part of the immediate context. All these things must be discerned properly to correctly understand the scriptures. Again, we need to follow Christ's example, who upheld the sanctity of every jot and tittle of God's word (Matt 5:18).