

## Introduction

- Paul once warned Timothy about the importance of knowing how to “*handle*” or “*divide*” the Scriptures.
  - 2 TIM. 2:15—“*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God..., rightly dividing the word of truth.*”
    - ▶ The Greek word trans. “*rightly dividing*” (ὀρθοτομέω) is “found [outside] the NT only [in] Prov. 3:6; 11:5 [LXX] where it...means ‘cut a path in a straight direction’ or ‘cut a road across country (that is...otherwise difficult to pass through) in a straight direction’, so that the traveler may go directly to his destination...”
      - “Then [‘rightly handle the word of truth’] would...mean **guide the word of truth along a straight path** (like a road that goes straight to its goal), **without being turned aside** by wordy debates and impious talk...”<sup>1</sup>
    - ▶ “to make straight and smooth, to handle aright, to *teach the truth directly and correctly*”<sup>2</sup>
      - Thus, the Greeks used the word to refer to **correct exegesis/exposition**.
        - “the Word of God is to be ‘handled’ *strictly along the lines of its teaching*.”<sup>3</sup>
    - ▶ “Thus it is **diametrically opposed to distortions and falsifications of the Word of God** (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2) by bad exegetes who twist texts (2 Pet. 3:16)...
      - “As opposed to the mythologizing orators and fabulists who adulterate the revealed teaching, Timothy will be faithful to **convey its traditional meaning** (2 Tim. 2:2,8) and **express it in adequate terms** (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13).”<sup>4</sup>
- Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been working to assist people in their attempts to “*wrest*” (ASV/KJV) or “*twist*” (ESV/NKJV) *the word of God* “unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16; cf. Gen. 3:1ff).
  - There are at least **three ways** in which people—sincere or not—mishandle, and thus twist, the Scriptures.

## Discussion

### I. OLD VS. NEW TESTAMENTS

- A. The common view of 2 Tim. 2:15 is *properly dividing the old and new covenants* (i.e., what role the old plays today).
  1. Many use select OT passages to **condemn** certain acts of which they, personally, disapprove:
    - a) For example, Lev. 19:28 and **tattoos** [“You shall not make any cuts on your body... or **tattoo yourselves...**”].
      - (1) But Lev. 19 also says it is sinful to:
        - (a) Forsake the Sabbath Day (3); harvest the outer rim of one’s field/vineyard (9,10); let your cattle breed with another kind of cattle (19a); sow two types of seed in the same field (19b); wear a garment with two different fabrics combined (19c); cut the “edges” of your hair/beard (27); etc.
      - (2) Those who use Lev. 19 to condemn tattoos would hardly use it to condemn any of these other things!
    - b) However, if it is sound exegesis to appeal to an OT chapter to condemn *one* of the things it condemns, then to refuse to condemn the *other* things that same chapter mentions would be to “**twist**” *the scriptures!*
  2. Others use the OT to **defend** certain acts in which they desire to partake:
    - a) For example, musical instruments in the worship of Jehovah (Exod. 15:20; 1 Chron. 15:16; et al.).
      - (1) NOTE: Mechanical instruments were not instituted by God, but were **added** (cp. Deut. 4:2) by David 500 years later (1 Chr. 15:16); the OT redundantly attributes these instruments to *David*, even calling them “**David’s**” (cf. 2 Chr. 29:26,27; 35:15; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:24,36,45,46; Amos 6:5)—*not Jehovah’s*, as other elements were (Exod. 20:26; Mal. 1:7,10).
      - (2) Ironically, the same is true of the new covenant, only in this case *1,000* years past before they were added.

<sup>1</sup> Danker, Frederick W., William F. Arndt & F.W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd Ed. (BDAG). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. p. 722. Print. Emp. added.

<sup>2</sup> Thayer, Joseph H. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009. p. 453. Print. Emp. and ital. added.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, W.E. *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Via e-Sword X. Rick Meyers. 2015. Franklin, TN. Accessed 6-7-17. Emp. added.

<sup>4</sup> Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Vol. 2. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2012. p. 595. Print. Emp. and ital. added.

- b) However, our point here is just as before, only backwards:
  - (1) No one today would appeal to the OT to argue for *animal sacrifice* under the new covenant;
  - (2) To appeal to the OT to argue for *musical instruments* under the new covenant is equally erroneous.
- B. In reality, though, **it does not matter what the OT Law says about anything, per se!**
  - 1. Half a millennium before Christ, God said He would usher in a *new system* to **replace the old** (Jer. 31:31-34)!
  - 2. The Lord, Himself, said that He had come to “**fulfill**” the old law (Matt. 5:17)—which He did.
    - a) καταλύω—“metaphorically to *overthrow*, i.e. **render vain, deprive of success, bring to naught**”<sup>5</sup>
  - 3. Paul told the Ephesians that Jesus “**abolished...the law of commandments contained in ordinances**” (Eph. 2:15).
  - 4. Paul told the Colossians the old law had been “*blotted out,*” “**set aside,**” and “*nailed to the cross*” (Col. 2:14).
    - a) HEB. 9:16—“For where there is a *testament*, there must also of necessity be *the death of the testator.*”
- C. So the full picture is this:
  - 1. Once Jesus died, the old system (in its *entirety*—see above) was **completed** (“fulfilled”);
  - 2. There was a **50-day “transition” period** (Passover to Pentecost);
  - 3. When the Holy Spirit came upon the 12 apostles, that glorious kingdom under the new and better covenant, with the **new law** finally arrived to **take the place of the old** (Isa. 2:1-4; Jer. 31:31-34; et al.)!
- D. **NOTE:** It is certainly true that there are some *timeless spiritual principles* in the OT which **transcend all covenants**.
  - 1. Exod. 20:24,25; Lev. 18:26-30; Mal. 2:16; 3:6—The *details* are covenant-specific, but the *principles* are **timeless**.
  - 2. However, strictly concerning the old Mosaic system, deeds can thereby be neither *condemned* nor *supported*.
- E. Nevertheless, it was not merely the “*ceremonial*” or “*ritualistic*” portion of the law that was abolished, leaving in effect the “*moral*” element, but **the entirety of the old covenant was nailed to the cross**.
  - 1. The writer of *Hebrews* explains that one reason for the abolition of the old was that *Israel did not keep it* (8:8,9).
  - 2. But it was the *moral* aspect that they didn’t keep—the *ceremonial* element being the only part they *did keep*!<sup>6</sup>
- F. Therefore, **we must search the New Testament for authority or prohibition of a thing.**

## II. LITERAL VS. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

- A. One of the most common (and consequential) mistakes made in the world of “Christendom” is **the inability** (or unwillingness) **to discern between literal and figurative/spiritual language in the Bible**.
- B. Numerous false doctrines are based upon this lack of proper dividing or “handling” of God’s word!
  - 1. Some turn *literal* language into *figurative* (e.g., Creation, days of Creation, the flood, Jonah & fish, etc.).
  - 2. Many more (it seems) turn *figurative/spiritual* language into *literal*:
    - a) Various prophecies of *the Messianic kingdom/kingdom of “Israel”* (cf. **Isa. 11:1ff**; Jer. 3:15-18; et al.);
    - b) Vast amount of the book of *Revelation*—“144,000” (7:1,4; 14:1,3); “*Armageddon*” (16); “1K Years” (20);
    - c) The so-called “*Rapture*” (Matt. 24:36-42; 1 Thess. 4:16,17);
    - d) Various prophecies of *Daniel* (e.g., chs. 8,9,11,12); etc.
- C. 2 TIM. 4:3,4—“For the time will come when they..., *having itching ears*, will...turn [from the truth] unto **fables**.”

## III. LAW VS. GRACE

- A. Many people have taken some of Paul’s epistles so out of context that they have gone mad with the contradistinction between “**law**” and “**grace**,” creating a great chasm between the two.

<sup>5</sup> Thayer. Ibid. p. 334. Emp. and ital. added.

<sup>6</sup> Coffman, James Burton. *Hebrews*. Abilene: ACU Press, 1971. pp. 164-5. Print. Emp. and ital. added.

1. One man wrote to Wayne Jackson that the NT is “not a ‘set of laws’ to which the Christian is obligated,” but that “the essence of the New Testament is *love and grace*, and ‘**love is not law**’ and ‘**grace is not law**.’”<sup>7</sup>
- B. The consequence of this failure in “sound exposition” is *making light of the NT Scriptures*.
  1. That man’s conclusion says it all (to paraphrase): “Since we are under ‘grace’ and not ‘law,’ there is *no pattern of worship to which we must adhere*.”
- C. This is the typical denominational way of viewing the NT, in general—anyone who really digs deep into the Word and respects its authority is a “*legalist*” or a new-age “*Pharisee*.”
- D. Truly, John referred to the old covenant as “law” and the new as “grace,” (1:17);
  1. Paul likewise contrasted “law” and “grace” often—that is, he contrasted **THE law (of Moses)** with the “grace” that is found only in the new covenant **of Christ!**
- E. But there was *grace* in the covenant of “law” (cf. Prov. 3:34; Ezra 9:8)—and even *before* it (cf. Gen. 6:8);
  1. Likewise, **there is “law” in the covenant of “grace”!**
- F. The Holy Spirit inspired OT prophets prophesied a new “law” that was forthcoming:
  1. ISA. 2:1-4—“...For out of Zion shall go forth the **LAW**, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem...”
  2. JER. 31:31-34—“...I will put My **LAW** in their minds, and write it on their hearts...” (33a).
- G. The apostle Paul repeatedly referred to the new covenant as “law”:
  1. ROM. 3:27b—“By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by **the LAW of faith**.”
  2. ROM. 7:22,23a—“For I delight in **the LAW of God**, in my inner being, but I see in my members *another law*...”
  3. ROM. 7:25b—“So then, I myself serve **the LAW of God** with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”
  4. ROM. 8:2—“For **the LAW of the Spirit of life** has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”
  5. 1 COR. 9:21—“...not [that I am] outside the law of God, but *under the LAW of Christ*...”
    - a) “Ἐννομος means *subject to the law*, but in the sense of *keeping within* (ἐν) the law.”<sup>8</sup>
  6. GAL. 6:2—“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill **the LAW of Christ**.”
  7. JAS. 1:25—“But the one who looks in **the perfect LAW, the LAW of liberty**, and perseveres...”
- H. He also—similar to John (1 Jn. 3:4)—reminded readers that “where there is *no law*, there is *no sin*” (Rom. 4:15)!
  1. Would anyone dare suggest that there is *no such thing as sin* under the new covenant of “grace”?
  2. But if there were no *law* in the new covenant, there would be no *sin* in the new covenant!
- I. Plainly, the NT includes a **system of specific religious obligations** for mankind today.
  1. Only those desiring to worship *themselves*, under the guise of worshiping God, would reject the idea of **NT law**.
  2. But those *honest* souls, on the other hand, who “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” will come to the *truth*—just as God desires (Matt. 7:7,8; 13:10-17; 1 Tim. 2:4; cp. Acts 8:26ff; 10:1ff; 16:6ff).

## Conclusion

- ➔ Failure to “rightly handle” or “divide” the word of truth can, and *will*, cause **eternally disastrous results**.
  - Cain (Gen. 4:3), Nadab & Abihu (Lev. 12:1,2), the Israelites (Mal. 1-3) all suffered for not properly handling God’s word.
- ➔ Therefore, **we must always be diligent in our pursuit of the TRUTH**, respecting and reverencing the holy word of God as *authoritative* and *final*—for only the *truth* can make us free (Jn. 8:32)!

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, Wayne. “Is Christian Worship Regulated by New Testament Law?” Web. [ChristianCourier.com](http://ChristianCourier.com). Accessed February 7, 2014, Stockton: Christian Courier. URL: <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/454-is-christian-worship-regulated-by-new-testament-law>, emp. added.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent, M.R. *Word Studies in the New Testament*. via e-Sword X. Ed. Rick Meyers. Franklin, TN. 2015. Accessed 6-9-17. Emp. and ital. added.