

Dear Friends,

These Gospel Gleanings writings just concluded a brief and, hopefully, simple summary of each book or letter contained in the New Testament. My hope by being brief and simple was to encourage the folks in the pew to spend more serious time with their Bible. While Paul wrote three letters in our New Testament (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) to young preachers under his personal charge, both preachers and folks in the pew can learn a wealth of spiritual wisdom and instruction from a study of these letters.

This week's Gleanings article deals with Paul's directions to Timothy to spend serious study of "...***the word of truth,***" of Scripture. As I recall, the author of these

words was Thomas a Kempis, "I have no greater pleasure than the time I spend in a nook with the Book." The more years I chalk up on my life's "Odometer" the more I appreciate that sentiment. The words of Scripture are not a mystical or magical mantra that we can recite without discernment that grows out of intense and prayerful study alone. To discover their precious treasure we must devote regular intense study time with our Bible.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 KJV)

In keeping with Paul's words in this verse, when we do read and study our Bibles, we must approach and respect it "*...not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.*"

When Luke introduced the Book of Acts, he framed his message as we should frame our study and teaching of it, "***...of all that Jesus began both to do and teach....***" Scripture contains sound and right (By God's measure, not ours) teaching, so we should follow its teachings throughout. However, we fail to teach--or study--the full message of the New Testament if we do not thoroughly study "all that Jesus began both to do and teach." He directed the writing of the Book, so our study and teaching of it must include His teaching and life to be

complete and fully beneficial for us in the trenches of life.

What is your current life struggle? What decision is highest on your priority list? On your "Pressure" list to find the Lord's answer? Take that question in prayer to Scripture and study. There is your answer, the only answer that will stand the test and discover the Lord's blessings on your path. Too many professing Christians in our time ignore Scripture, do what they "Think" they should do with no direction (Or often in conflict) from Scripture, and then seem bewildered when the outcome is disastrous for them. If we seek the Lord's approval, the key outcome that Paul named in our study passage, we can only find it by our study of His Book, and by framing our decisions and

conduct with what His Book teaches us to do. Follow John's example.

*And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, **Take it, and eat it up**; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. (Revelation 10:9 KJV)*

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Respect for “Right Division” of Scripture

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be

ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV 1900)

2 Timothy 2, beginning to end, is one of the most informative-to-the-Jesus-way-of-living chapters in the New Testament for people in the pulpit and in the pews. Paul both instructs us regarding the supremacy of Scripture for the faithful believer, and he warns Timothy—and us—of unhealthy habits that supplant Scripture with striving “*about words to no profit,*” or “*...profane and vain babblings*” that increase ungodliness, not edification. If we examine any verse or lesson in the context of the whole chapter, we learn that Paul warned Timothy against habits of mind or thought that either supplement or supplant Scripture. (To borrow a cute cliché, at the risk of highlighting some

sacred cows that would serve their owners better to be packed up and shipped “Down the river,” instead of protected as if they were the holy grail) How much time do we waste in study and meditation, along with subsequent conversations, on questions not at all addressed in Scripture? For example, “Why do you think...?” When we fully know that Scripture doesn’t mention a word regarding our question. Increasingly, when asked one of those questions, I try as gently as possible, to redirect the conversation to something that Scripture clearly and specifically teaches. If Scripture doesn’t address and answer our question, the Author of Scripture knows that question has no edification value. Why chase a question that we’ll never answer outside our imagination?

I confess to studying words, both in our English language and in New Testament Greek. However, my primary objective is not—ever—to correct or modify my KJV Bible, but to find any tool I can find to communicate the text to my readers or hearers. I also confess to avoidance of the strategy which seems increasingly—and naively—to think reading or studying New Testament Greek provides the absolute answer to all questions, doctrines, and teachings in and of itself. When Paul wrote our study verse to Timothy, he wrote in New Testament Greek, and he reminded Timothy of the need to “Rightly divide” what he wrote. Whether we are fluent in English or the common (“Koine”) Greek language of the first century, ***we face the same requirement for study to rightly divide what we read.*** Being fluent in

New Testament Greek or researching Greek word definitions and literary form in no degree diminishes our charge to “Study” so as to rightly divide, correctly interpret, what we read in Scripture.

Approximately fifty men participated in the translation of our King James Bible. They were not novices, either in the Scriptures or in the original languages which they translated to give us our King James Bible. Whenever someone claims to know enough of the original languages to correct the KJV text, intended or not, they imply greater personal skill in those languages than the entire translation team which translated our KJV. And often six different men who claim a degree of expertise in those languages don't agree among themselves. This obvious issue underscores the precise point Paul made

in our study verse. Even in New Testament Greek as one's primary language, study was necessary to arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, "rightly divided." As Bible believers, our task is not correction of the text, but respectful and right interpretation of it. More than one man I've know who actually had valid credentials in those original languages has encouraged me with their reminder; our best investment of time in study is with our KJV Bible—in English—which gives us every tool we need for the inspired goal of "***rightly dividing the word of truth.***"

The longer I live the more I marvel at the precision and clarity of my KJV Bible. I personally prefer a British published KJV with a center reference column that includes the translators' optional or alternate words. Occasionally

folks who are critical of the KJV will attempt to diminish its integrity with “If the KJV is divinely preserved Scripture, why do the various publishers’ editions contain variations?” Don’t allow this “Red herring” detraction. The sponsors of the “Pure Cambridge Edition” (“PCE”) of the KJV offer their list of differences between their 1900 edition, a very good representation of the KJV text, and other editions. How extensive is this list of differences? Less than 15 examples! And those differences involve different spelling of proper names, upper or lower case (Usually involving “Spirit” vs. “spirit”), or similar minor distinctions. None of these differences in any remote way impacts our doctrinal convictions from the Scriptures, not one. I’ve applied this list to every publisher’s edition of the KJV that I’ve owned in the last fifteen or

so years. No edition differed from the “PCE” text in all the points raised in this list, and none in any remote way alters the substance of my faith. This kind of criticism, in this old man’s perspective, is far more an example of “Much ado about nothing.”

From my copy of the 1769 “Blayney” KJV to my latest Nelson single column KJV, every copy I’ve owned or examined of the KJV was consistent in its text with only some of these minor variations that have no effect whatever on what I believe about God or about my Christian walk.

What believers today need is not more study in the original languages of the Bible, but more thinking and devoted study of their English KJV. And, regardless the publisher, our task is not to play critic or “Editor” of the text, but

rather to study it sufficiently to rightly divide, interpret, it. Based on the inspired words of our study verse, all Scripture is “...*the word of truth.*” Therefore, our task is not to become a critic of Scripture and magnify personal opinion above the text of Scripture by claiming to divide truth from error within the text. Our task, defined by the verse, is to “*rightly divide the word of truth.*”

No doubt, many devoted Bible students who, like I do at times, chase Hebrew or Greek words, have good intentions. However, those of us who occupy a pulpit on Sunday morning should pause and give serious thought to how our attitude in preaching, and in describing our personal study, impacts the people in the pew. Too much chasing original language words and literary form is liable to discourage a serious study of

Scripture in the pew, not foster a greater study of it. “If my pastor can only understand the Bible by his study in the original languages, I can’t possibly understand it by reading only my English KJV. Therefore, I’ll just stop reading and trust him to tell me what to believe.” Pastors, is this really what you want the people to think in the congregation you serve?

Second sacred cow that needs “A trip down the river.” Occasionally, over my sixty plus years in ministry, I’ve heard very sincere preachers appeal to Jesus’ words to either the twelve or the seventy whom He sent to preach, interpreting those instructions so as to contradict Paul’s words to Timothy. Jesus warned the disciples that preaching Him and His words might put them in conflict with the civil authorities. When they were arrested

and asked to defend themselves, He assured them. Don't become so obsessed with the potential of such an event as to rehearse it and try to frame your words in advance. "*Give no thought...it will be given you in that hour.*" Jesus' words to the disciples to not give thought didn't even apply to their preaching. It applied to their possible appearance before civil magistrates because of their preaching. A preacher who gives no thought to his sermon contradicts Paul's words to Timothy, and, sadly for the hungry sheep in his congregation, they will soon readily conclude that he gave no thought to his sermon.

Many years ago, a young believer asked me an interesting question, "How much time do you spend in study and preparation for your sermons?" I thought

for a moment and replied. I had been preaching for forty or fifty years at the time, so I grinned and said, “Around forty years.” Seriously, personal experience and personal observation have consistently affirmed the wisdom and truth of Paul’s words to Timothy. Not only must a man “Study” to rightly divide the Scriptures, but ***he must maintain current study*** to be able to teach old truth in a fresh and edifying manner. Scripture often compares preaching to food. You don’t eat, much less serve others, food you prepared a year or twenty years ago. If you intend to serve healthy nutritious food, natural or spiritual, you need to prepare it fresh.

During my early years in ministry, I recall my surprise when a preacher I’d known most of my life stood up to preach and opened his sermon with the Biblically

unacceptable “I’ve been too busy recently to properly study my Bible.” He followed this excuse with his proposed solution. He actually stated that he would allow his Bible to fall open randomly, and the first verses he observed on the page would be his text. Over just a few years, I heard this man introduce his sermons this way several times. And every single time, his Bible strangely “Fell open” to exactly the same page, and his eyes first noticed the same exact verses. And, sadly for the congregation, he preached the same exact sermon every time. He was content to feed his hearers the spiritual equivalent of a stale frozen TV dinner when Scripture required him to do everything in his power to feed them a gourmet meal. Folks, the Lord doesn’t automatically cover a man’s study neglect. And He definitely never directs a

man to preach the same sermon he's preached many times before, almost word for word. If the Lord blesses a man to preach, it will not be stale repetition from the preacher's past. It will be fresh, nutritious and edifying spiritual gospel food. If we who occupy the pulpit have any hope of truly preaching the gospel and feeding, "Edifying," our congregation, we must take Paul's words to heart and "Study" daily and constantly.

Paul further qualifies his inspired teaching to Timothy and us. Our study and right division, or interpretation, of Scripture is not to display our knowledge or soundness to the congregation, but rather to preach to our congregation sound, wholesome, and spiritually nutritious words which the Lord will approve and bless to both the preacher's and the congregation's edification. Wise

godly preachers don't strive for a good "Rating" from the congregation. They seek the Lord's approval of their preaching, and that approval only comes from intense and current personal "Study." In this verse, the idea of "Study" requires a fresh eagerness to expend energy and effort to learn what Scripture teaches, what the divine Author intended it to teach. Consider Jesus' words regarding wise "Kingdom" service.

Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. (Matthew 13:52 KJV)

How can we bring forth (In our preaching) things ***new and old*** unless

we are presently engaged in an eager and prayerful investment of energy to refresh and deepen our knowledge of Scripture?

One final word from an old fellow who spent sixty-seven years on this journey, and who, confessedly, learned many of his lessons the hard way, by personal experience that Scripture always corrected. Pastors/preachers, our first compelling motive to study, truly study Scripture should never be to create our Sunday sermon. It should be to learn as much as possible from Scripture for our personal spiritual growth and health. If we go to Scripture for our own spiritual “Food,” and digest it thoroughly in our minds and conduct, the Lord will guide us to the sermon He wants us to preach to the congregation. Further, the people in the pew will “Hear the sermon” we preach

with our feet long before they hear the sermon we preach from the pulpit, and they will be much more inclined to hear and work to practice that pulpit-sermon.

The Lord gives us all the tools and information we need to grow strong, mature, and healthy in His teachings. And across the centuries since Jesus, He has graciously provided that teaching in Bibles in the common language of the day. Trust it. Study it. And pray for grace to live by it. In the end, we all should seek His approval of our study and conduct.

Elder Joe Holder