

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

SPEAKING CLEARLY

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)

This is one of the large caliber guns that is often rolled out when teachers of religion desire to take aim at persuading their followers to "study" the scriptures. We have all probably used it in this context before but we have done so in error. It is rather an oddity that a verse which plainly teaches the necessity of "rightly dividing" (i.e. accurately or plainly setting forth) the word would be one whose meaning is so greatly and often misconstrued. Now while it is a noble endeavor (see Acts 17:11) to search (i.e.; study) the scriptures, the word which is translated as study here does not mean to "spend time in a scholarly pursuit of knowledge". Rather the meaning of study here is literally to "to hasten, make haste, to exert one's self, endeavor, give diligence" (Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary). So the clear teaching of the passage is that we should give diligence to shew(i.e.; present or provide) ourselves approved (i.e.: acceptable or pleasing; the Greek word is where we get our English word, document, and literally means: not counterfeit) unto the LORD. A very similar passage is found in Romans 12:1; "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto GOD, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of GOD,*" and then again in Romans 14:18; "*For he that in these things serveth CHRIST is acceptable to GOD, and approved of men.*" We are admonished in this passage to be diligent in our effort to serve the LORD. Now while an understanding of the outworking of GOD's grace prevents us from the error of thinking that we can earn favor by our endeavors to be faithful to HIM or that we would even desire to do so, it does not preclude the concept of putting forth effort which is intended to glorify HIM who gave HIMSELF for us. Grace is not the enemy of effort and diligence. Rather effort and diligence are the result and trophy of grace.

Intentions of effort are worthy of note (see Mat. 26:41) but are not a replacement for diligence and discipline. (see I Cor.9:27) Good intentions are a placebo for the flesh. We must not allow ourselves to sleep on this enchanted ground. The scriptures are full of exhortations and admonitions to the people of GOD to be up and busy, to be overcomers and watchmen. There is sin to be wrestled with, there are principalities and powers which are to be fought, there are imaginations which must be cast down, there are winds of doctrine which blow GOD's people to and fro, brethren the enemies of the cross have declared their intentions. Will we not arise and put on the whole armor of GOD? Will we sit idly by as false prophets decimate the flock of GOD? "*Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?*"(Isaac Watts -1709) We do not labor in the power of the flesh but we labor in the power of HIM who has all power. As our text says we are "workmen" (i.e.; laborers) who have no reason to be found ashamed. We are the children of light. Let us then put on the armor of light and flee the darkness. (see Rom.13:12; Eph 5:8; 6:12; I Thes.5:4-10) Leave others to their excuses, let us watch and be sober.

Now we are brought to another very clear admonition that follows closely to the first, *"rightly dividing the word of truth"*. There is no way to fulfill the first part of this verse without attending to the second. In fact it is only by an accurate discernment of the truth that one can properly understand what it means to "give diligence". Some would make it a work of the flesh, others would ignore it all together. "Rightly dividing" literally means to "cut straight or proceed on a straight path". " I believe we get something of the idea by something the LORD said; *"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62) The implication is if a man takes his eyes off of the work in front of him he will go astray or not plow a straight row. We must be those who speak clearly concerning the word of GOD. We must guard against fanciful explanations of simple truths or the tendency to twist the word to fit our doctrinal understanding, support our pet causes, or justify our ungodly actions. We cannot possibly understand, completely, every verse in Holy Writ.

Sometimes we must admit our ignorance of it, rather than plowing a furrow that must be filled in at a later time. There are enough fools who empty their minds before the multitudes with out us joining their number. I am convinced that there is no person nor groups of people who know all the answers. However we must be plain spoken about those things we do know, pray for grace to be silent about those we don't, and wisdom to know the difference. Brother Rolfe Barnard, once said, "the Bible doesn't always mean what it says, it means what it means." Oh for spiritual wisdom to know what it means and grace to practice what it clearly tells us. Such is to speak clearly, rightly dividing the word of truth.

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