

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES

Introduction: The purpose of this paper is to help preachers, teachers, and Bible students to understand Jesus Christ's ministry to the Gentiles. This paper is divided into three parts followed by a conclusion. The first part provides background information on rightly dividing the word of truth and an example. The second part deals briefly with Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. The last part focuses on Jesus' heavenly ministry through the apostle Paul.

In my experience, people have been unintentionally misled by "red" letter editions of the Bible, which indicate Jesus' words spoken on earth. Since most of the "red" letters appear in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the majority of preaching and teaching heretofore has come from the four gospels. This causes many people to overlook or deemphasize the "black" letters in our Bible, when in fact many of the Lord's words are in black because they were spoken from heaven.

"If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (I Corinthians 14:37)

PART I - BACKGROUND - (Rightly dividing the word of truth)

In II Timothy 2:15 we find the following:

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

This command of God (I Corinthians 14:37) tells how one can be approved unto God and that study and work go together (Ecclesiastes 12:12b). However, what most people do not understand is that: They are to study by "... rightly dividing the word of truth!"

One of the reasons why there are so many different denominations, sects, and disagreements between groups is because of the lack of, or improper, right division. About the only division some people can make is a division between the books of Malachi and Matthew. Right division is much more than that.

Right division requires one to recognize that there is a difference between Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God (I Corinthians 10:32). Also, one must realize that certain books of the Bible are written to a specific group of people: such as Obadiah was written concerning Edom, Ephesians was written to the saints which were at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1), and James was written to the twelve tribes scattered abroad (James 1:1).

Right division of the word of truth allows the believer to find which portions of God's word apply directly to that individual. The easiest example to see is that of God's commands regarding man's meat (food) in the Bible.

In Genesis 1:29 we find:

"And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat."

So God's first command regarding diet to the man and woman was that they were to be *vegetarians*.

After the flood in Noah's day, God gave a different command unto Noah and his family in Genesis 9:3, 4:

"Every moving thing that liveth shall he meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.
But flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat."

Therefore, Noah and his descendants were *meat and potato* eaters.

This was God's plan for mankind after the flood until the Law was given to the nation of Israel. Leviticus Chapter 11, and Deuteronomy Chapter 14, spell out Israel's dietary laws that were given while Israel was wandering in the wilderness. (No pork, no catfish, no squid or octopus - this would be rough on some people). But remember that this was given to Israel - not the heathen nations (Leviticus 11:2 and Deuteronomy 14:1, 2).

Well, time passes by in the Bible and we find that God calls and deals with Saul as he came near Damascus. The Lord told Ananias " ... Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:15)

Then in Acts 10:12-15 God gives Peter a vision:

Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

(The book of Acts [which is called the Acts of the Apostles] starts with Peter in Jerusalem and ends up with Paul in Rome. This is a transitional book in our Bible when God starts to deal directly with the Gentiles. In Acts 9 remember that: God called Saul " ... who also is called Paul ... " (Acts 13:9) to go to the Gentiles, and in Acts 10 God told Peter to go minister unto Cornelius, a Gentile.)

Please keep in mind that, while the book of Acts was unfolding, Peter was the main apostle in Acts 1-12 and, then Acts records the acts of Paul, the main apostle in Acts 13-28. At the end of the book of Acts we find Paul in Rome (Acts 28:16), and that he was speaking unto the Jews. Then Paul makes a statement in verse 28: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it."

Well, let us return again to commandments regarding food. We find in Romans 14:2, 3 the following:

“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.”

In Romans 14:14, 15 we find:

I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

Likewise, I Corinthians 8 deals with food offered to idols. We find in verse 7: "Howbeit *there is not* in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat *it* as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled." So Paul states in verse 13, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

The final passage on meat one should consider is found in I Timothy 4:1-5.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils;

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

So one can see in God's word that there are several different commands regarding meat. A person can't do all because in one case it was a vegetarian diet, in another meat and vegetables, in another a restricted diet, and in another one can't eat things because of a weak brother or in the last case nothing is to be refused. What to do?

The answer is to (1) Consider what Paul says:

II Timothy 2:7 - "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."
(2) Rightly divide the word of truth, including Paul's epistles (II Timothy 2:15).

In order to rightly divide the word of truth one must realize in what age he is living. Obviously, we don't live in Adam's or Noah's time. We are not today under the requirements of Leviticus or Deuteronomy (Colossians 2:16). Also, we must realize that the doctrine regarding meats in Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 is different than that of I Timothy 4.

In Paul's Acts ministry we are to note that he went to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:5, 14, 15, 16, & 42).

Acts 13:46 - "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

Romans 1:16 - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

We know that the books of Romans, I & II Corinthians, and Galatians were written during the Acts period and differ from Paul's other epistles in doctrinal matters.

In I Timothy 2:7 we find - "Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity."

Obviously, this book was written after Acts 28:28.

So, by rightly dividing the word of truth, and considering what Paul said in I Timothy 4:3-5: we can eat any creature because there is nothing to be refused of them who know and believe the truth. Hence, here is an application of right division.

PART II - JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY

We will study several passages in Matthew, John, and Romans.

In Matthew, Chapter 10, Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them power (verses 1-4). Let us note verses 5, 6, & 7 rather carefully:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, [Read that again.] and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. [Read that verse again.]

And as ye go, preach saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Let me summarize these three verses in that the message of the kingdom of heaven was for the lost sheep of the house of Israel and was NOT for the Samaritans or Gentiles!

John 1:11: "He [Jesus] came unto his own, [Israel] and his own received him not."

In Matthew 15:21-28 Jesus dealt with a woman of Canaan (a Gentile). She requested mercy from the Lord (verse 22) which he gave (verse 28); but let us look closely at the Lord's response in verse 23.

"But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us."

Can you imagine the rejection, and how she must have felt, being looked down upon by his disciples? Then in verse 24 Jesus makes a very important statement about his earthly ministry.

"But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
(Matthew 15:24)

In Romans 15:8 the Bible says:

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision [Israel] for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers:"

So I think that it is very clear from these examples that Jesus' earthly ministry was to the nation of Israel.

PART III - PAUL'S MINISTRY (Jesus' heavenly ministry)

Remember that in Acts 9 that the Lord Jesus called Paul from heaven. Jesus is now in his heavenly ministry after the cross.

In Acts Chapter 22 when Paul was giving his testimony in the Hebrew tongue, he starts telling about binding and delivering both men and women unto prisons and how he beat the Jews in the synagogues that believed in Jesus, and how he kept the raiment of the martyr Stephen. Everything is going along just fine until verses 21 and 22.

"And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, [Gentile - a word that the Jews didn't like!] and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live," (Remember how the Lord's disciples in Matthew 15:23 treated the Gentile woman. Even Jesus in Matthew 15:26 referred to her as a dog!)

With this background on how the Jews perceived the Gentiles, it is no wonder that Paul did not confer with flesh and blood when God called him to preach his Son among the heathen (Galatians 1:15-20).

In Romans 15:16 we find that Paul is the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and that he ministered the gospel of God. Remember, that in Acts 9:15 and Acts 22:21 that Jesus chose Paul to bear his name before the Gentiles ... and that he'd send Paul far hence unto the Gentiles.

We also see that the glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed to Paul's trust:

"According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."
(I Timothy 1:11)

In Romans 11:13 Paul writes:

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:"

In II Timothy 1:11 Paul states what Jesus appointed him to do:

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles."

We should remember that it was the Lord Jesus Christ from his heavenly throne who put Paul in this ministry.

I Timothy 1:12 - "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry."

Paul's gospel was a secret! "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began." (Romans 16:25) Since it was a secret, it was not known by the apostles in Jerusalem until Galatians 2, some seventeen years after Paul returned again unto Damascus (Galatians 1:18 and 2:1).

Paul did not receive his gospel from man but from Jesus Christ in heaven.

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11, 12)

Paul was given the dispensation of the grace of God. We get our word *dispenser* from the word *dispensation*. A dispenser is something that gives out items such as towels or soap. In the military service, when one gets sick he goes to the dispensary to get medicine. So, in the Bible sense, Paul dispensed the grace of God doctrinally. This dispensation can also be thought of as a period of time. Indeed, today, we live in the age of grace (see Ephesians 3:1, 2).

What should not be surprising, since Paul's gospel was a mystery, is that the Bible records that the dispensation of God's grace was also a mystery. Ephesians 3:3-9:

How that by revelation he [Jesus Christ] made known unto me the mystery;
(as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my
knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now
revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of
his promise in Christ by the gospel:

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given
unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should
preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; [They were
unsearchable because they were a mystery.]

And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the
beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Just as revealing is what God records in Colossians 1:25-27:

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; [No need for the book of Mormon if Paul's letters fulfilled the word of God.]

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

By the grace of God that was given unto Paul, he laid the foundation and others build thereon and that foundation is Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 3:10, 11).

So in I Corinthians 4:1 we see that Paul and others were the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

When Paul was writing to Titus, he stated in Chapter 1, verse 3 that:

"But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior;"

The scriptures that Paul wrote (Romans through Philemon) contain the commandments of the Lord (I Corinthians 14:37).

The scripture commands us to rightly divide the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

We are to follow Paul's doctrine and example. We are to mark them who do not follow Paul and mark them that do.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; [from Paul] and avoid them." (Romans 16:17)

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." (II Thessalonians 3:6)

"Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us." (II Thessalonians 3:9)

The 'us' in verses 6 & 9 above is stated in Chapter 1, verse 1: "PAUL, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians ... :"

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." (II Thessalonians 3:14).

"Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." (Philippians 3:16, 17)

I trust it is now clear that we are to be following Paul as he ministered Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you."
(I Corinthians 11:1, 2)

I Corinthians 11:23-26 is an example of an ordinance.

Now then, it should be no surprise that Paul is our pattern in this age in which we live, the dispensation of grace. In I Timothy 1:15, 16 he writes:

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (II Timothy 1:13)

We are admonished in Philippians 4:9 - "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, [Paul] do; and the God of peace shall be with you."

Paul told the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians 4:1, 2:

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

CONCLUSION - I think that it is evident from God's word that there is a difference in Jesus Christ's earthly ministry and his heavenly ministry.

The major application from this study is that we are to be following Jesus Christ through Paul's ministry and not Moses' or Peter's. Thus one can find God's will for his life. Do not misunderstand that since Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, we are not to only study his letters, for:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness:" (II Timothy 3:16)

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" (Ephesians 5:18, 19)

May God bless you by the reading of his word. "... for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." (Psalm 138: 2b)

