

Bible Distinctions



by Pastor Win Johnson

Does the Bible Make Sense?

"The Bible is so difficult to understand!" Have you ever heard this statement or even made it yourself?

*When studying the Scriptures, an important guideline is to "rightly divide" (II Timothy 2:15). Consider the fact that while all Scripture is **for** our learning, it is not all written **to** us and for our obedience in this dispensation of the Grace of God. We present the articles in this booklet for your consideration, and trust they will be helpful in pointing out some major contrasts in the Bible.*

Pastor Win Johnson, the late president of Grace Gospel Publishers, originally wrote these and other articles to be placed in community newspapers. Some caused consternation among the religious and denominational folks who read them, and often generated phone calls and letters which then created opportunities to discuss the Word and spread the Truth with those who were interested.

We trust that you will agree with us that "yes"—the Bible does make sense!

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Unscriptural or Undispensational

A pastor friend of this writer has written the following: "There are professing Christians who religiously practice the washing of feet. Are they Scriptural or unscriptural? There are some who anoint the sick with oil, while others use blessed handkerchiefs. Are they Scriptural or unscriptural? Still others tarry for the Holy Spirit after they have received Christ for salvation. Some professing Christians claim to have visions and angelic visitations while hearing supernatural voices. Are they Scriptural or unscriptural? Thousands of others break forth in some kind of speech which they call the gift of tongues. Is it Scriptural or unscriptural to speak in tongues?"

TO WHICH WE ADD: Scriptures can be found to substantiate all of these actions. However, it seems to us that it is less than intellectual honesty, much less a spiritual practice, to arbitrarily select certain Bible commands for obedience while completely disregarding others. Why not obey the mandates in Numbers 15:32-36 and Deuteronomy 21:18-21 where infractions were to be punished by publicly stoning the offender to death? Why not build a tabernacle and offer sacrifices as God commanded in Exodus 25-31? Why not "sell that ye have and give alms" as Christ instructed in Luke 12:33? In short, WHY OBEY CERTAIN BIBLE COMMANDS AND IGNORE OTHERS? WHY NOT OBEY THEM ALL?

The answer to these questions is clearly stated in II Timothy 2:15: "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*" Though ALL Scripture is most certainly for our admonition and instruction, all Scripture is NOT for our obedience. In fact, obeying commands given to others in past economies could be direct disobedience in this age. (Compare Genesis 17:10-14 with Galatians 5:2 and Romans 2:25-29. Also, Matthew 19:16-21 with Romans 4:5 and Ephesians 2:8-9.) II Timothy 3:16-17 does not contradict or nullify II Timothy 2:15. To the Apostle Paul, the Glorified Lord revealed God's message and program for this age of grace. To him was committed the dispensation of the Grace of God. (See Ephesians 3:1-9.) In his epistles, we find the commands given directly to the Body of Christ.

The question then, is not only, IS IT SCRIPTURAL, but IS IT DISPENSATIONAL?

Prophecy and the Mystery

"What are the two basic divisions of the Bible?" Without a moments hesitation the answer came back... "the Old and New Testaments." We were not surprised. The majority of professing Christians would have concurred. BUT, is this correct. It seems to us that these traditional divisions of the Bible do not accurately designate the teaching they are supposed to represent. For example, Genesis is not in the O.T. nor is the greatest portion of the Gospel records in the N.T.

Therefore, we respectfully suggest that the answer to the first question, in this article, should be... "PROPHECY and the MYSTERY." Please note the following Scriptures: II Samuel 7:16-17, Isaiah 65:19-25, Jeremiah 23:5, Daniel 2:44, Matthew 6:10 and 19:27-29, and I Peter 1:10-11. **Prophecy** concerns the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on the earth and God's purpose for Israel and the nations ON THE EARTH. Proclamation of this prophetic purpose was committed particularly to the Twelve Apostles. See Matthew 10:5-7, Acts 1:6-8 and 3:19-26, also, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46-49, and John 20:21-23.

In contrast to this, we have the Scriptures which concern the Lord's people in this age. In these, we read of the **Mystery**, God's secret purpose for the Church, the Body of Christ, IN HEAVEN. This purpose was first revealed to the Apostle Paul (Galatians 1:11-12, Ephesians 3:1-9, Colossians 1:25-27). William R. Newell wrote, "Paul's letters constitute an independent and complete body of doctrine. They reveal not only God's method of salvation in this age, but also, the true character, calling and destiny of the Church." In this same connection, the Scofield Reference Bible says, in a footnote, "In his writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church." With these statements, we are in hearty accord.

Comparing the Gospel of Matthew with the book of Ephesians will point out the obvious difference between God's prophetic purpose (prophecy) and God's secret purpose (the mystery). Many have evidenced great interest in prophecy. Would that more were concerned about the mystery. May we never confuse the two.

Law and Grace

The two primary methods by which God has dealt with the human race through the ages, are best described by the words LAW and GRACE. Standing in clear opposition to one another these two principles form a striking contrast in God's dealings with mankind. Failure to make a distinction between the two can only result in a mixed system of LAW and GRACE, dishonoring to the Lord.

In I John 1:17, we read, "For the LAW was given through Moses but GRACE and truth came through Jesus Christ." As the written LAW was not instituted until some 140 years after the birth of Moses (Exodus 20), neither was the message of GRACE proclaimed until about 45 years after the birth of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:38-39). As Moses was the dispenser of the LAW (Deuteronomy 4, Hebrews 8:5), so the Apostle Paul was God's chosen vessel to be the dispenser of GRACE (Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 1:25, I Corinthians 3:10, Galatians 1:11-12).

The LAW (Ten Commandments) has been defined as the "unchanging expression of God's holy will." Though it is "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:13), it was "weak through the flesh" (Romans 8:3) and unable to change the vile, wicked, rebellious heart of man. It was ever so. LAW may force man to refrain from doing wrong, but it can never teach him to do right.

On the other hand, GRACE (God's undeserved and unmerited favor to man) "teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously and Godly in this present age" (Titus 2:12). Knowing what God has done for us in Christ, is the greatest incentive to do right.

Why then, someone asks, did God give the LAW? The answer is found in Romans 3:19-20. Here, we are told that "by the LAW is the knowledge of sin." Seeing God's perfect standard, in the LAW, man must acknowledge that he is a lost sinner and cast himself upon the mercy and GRACE of God.

While the LAW said "DO" and demanded righteousness, GRACE announces that the work for man's salvation has all been "DONE" and bestows God's righteousness as a gift (Romans 5:17). "In Whom we have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His GRACE" (Ephesians 1:7).

Faith and Works

"But I've always tried to do right." The feeble protest fell from the lips of an elderly man on his death bed. This writer had attempted to show him from the Scriptures why he needed a Saviour. It was pointed out that "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20); and "There is none righteous, no, not one." "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." "For ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 12, 23).

Without acknowledging that God's portrayal of the human race pertained to him, this dear man was seeking to justify himself by his own good works. Never before had he understood that "by Grace are ye saved through FAITH and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, NOT OF WORKS, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). When Hebrews 11:6 "Without FAITH it is **impossible** to please God" was read to him, he was completely disarmed.

It may be asked, "Doesn't God want good works?" Most assuredly, He does, but as the **result** of FAITH, **not as a substitute for it**. A lifetime may be spent striving to earn salvation, but all to no avail. For God says, "But to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his FAITH is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Saving FAITH is in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" was Paul's instruction to the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31). This is not a mere historical faith but is a personal appropriation of the Person and Work of Christ for oneself. Only when this matter is settled is one eligible to do good works, pleasing to God.

By the way, the man referred to above, did turn to Christ in saving faith before departing this life. The day he went to be with the Lord, he was heard to say, "Without FAITH, it is impossible to please God."

The Kingdom and the Church

The KINGDOM and the CHURCH...to many they are one and the same. Working under the premise that "the CHURCH is spiritual Israel," multitudes of religious people are engaged in "bringing souls into the KINGDOM," "advancing the KINGDOM," "proclaiming the KINGDOM," etc. Though sincere, these efforts, we believe, are misleading, to say the least. In Colossians 1:13, the Apostle Paul, by the Spirit, says that believers have been "translated into the KINGDOM of the Son of His love," but this is far different from the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN as proclaimed in the gospel records.

The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN was first promised to David (II Samuel 7:16), announced as "at hand" (near) by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), Christ (Matthew 4:17) and the Twelve (Matthew 10:7) and offered for Israel's acceptance by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 3:17-21). The offer was rejected when Israel's leaders committed the unpardonable sin as recorded in Acts 7, and God judicially set the nation aside. Though Israel as a nation is now blinded (Romans 11:25), the time will come when the blindness will be removed; and she will recognize Him Whom she crucified as her promised Messiah and King. (Read Zechariah 12-14.)

Simultaneously, with the setting aside of Israel, God revealed through the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:1-9) His secret plans for this age. These included the formation of the CHURCH, the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:20-23, 5:32, Colossians 1:18, 24). This is not a building or an organization but a spiritual organism, made up of Jew and Gentile and reconciled to God by the work of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:16). The CHURCH is not a subject of prophecy. Unlike the KINGDOM, which has for its destination the earth, the CHURCH will one day be raptured to Heaven (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Following this secret coming of Christ **for** the CHURCH, the Great Tribulation will come upon the earth (Matthew 24). Then, when evil has reached its zenith, Christ will come in power and great glory (Revelation 19:11-16) to stop the Battle of Armageddon, set up the KINGDOM, and bring peace to the earth for the first time.

Israel and the Body of Christ

"We are Israel." This is the claim made by many of the cults and sects of Christendom. "The mother of all heresies" says one Bible expositor, and we are inclined to agree. Were it not for the unwarranted appropriation of Israel's prophecies and promises by professing Christians, there would be no Scriptural basis for much of the unsound teaching in the world today.

The nation of Israel had its historical beginning some 1900 years before the birth of Christ. Genesis 12:1-3 records God's promise to Abram that "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Thus, God set in motion His prophetic plan which included the calling-out of the nation Israel. Through this highly-favored people (Romans 9:4-5) was to come the Redeemer, as well as the fulfillment of God's purposes for the earth. Israel, however, failed to realize her place of privilege. Repeatedly, we read (in the Old Testament, the Gospels, and on into early Acts) of God's striving with "a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Romans 10:21). Israel's rebellion reached a climax when its leaders rejected Christ in resurrection. As a result, God's dealings with the nation ceased, and His secret purpose for the Church was introduced. Israel, however, has not been abandoned. After the Rapture of the Church (I Thessalonians 4:13-18), God will resume His plans and program for the Chosen People (Romans 11).

In this age, God is calling out of **all** nations, tribes, and tongues, the Church which is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). As we have indicated before, **this Church is not an organization but an organism**. It includes **all** who have appropriated by faith the shed Blood and Finished Work of Christ for their soul's salvation. National privilege or personal prestige has nothing to do with membership in **this** Church. It is solely the work of the Spirit, baptizing the one who believes the Gospel into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13).

Failure to distinguish between God's earthly people Israel and His Heavenly people, the Body of Christ, can only result in the God-dishonoring practice of "spiritualizing" plain Bible truth. Someone has well said, "When we spiritualize, we tell spiritual lies."

Standing and State

When this writer, at the age of 15, trusted Christ as Savior, he had a hazy idea that keeping saved depended on his own doings. For almost three years, he lived in uncertainty and doubt, fearful that because of having committed some sin, he had now lost his salvation. Coming to understand the difference between **STANDING** and **STATE** changed all this, and a new-found joy and assurance came into his life.

Perhaps, the best illustration of this distinction is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. He writes, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints...."(1:2) and in verse 4, "I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Christ Jesus." This was the perfect **STANDING** into which these Corinthian believers had been called by God's grace. Sad to say, their **STATE** was anything but perfect.

"Contentions" were prevalent in their midst. They had failed to judge immorality in the local assembly and were even guilty of going to law against one another (1:11, 5:1-2, 6:6). In 3:1-4, the Apostle reminds them that because of their carnality, they had to be fed with "milk" instead of "meat." This was the **STATE** of these Corinthian saints. Small wonder that Paul found it necessary to use strong language in seeking to right the many wrongs among them.

It should be evident that the believer's **STANDING** is the way God looks at him in Christ. It is dependent upon what Christ has done. Nothing can change this perfect position. On the other hand, the believer's **STATE** is the way he lives in this life. It is dependent upon his obedience to the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. This **STATE** may, and often does, change.

May it be the compelling desire of our lives, as God's children, to make our **STATE** more like our **STANDING**. This can only be accomplished by heeding the admonition in Romans 6:13—"Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Salvation and Rewards

"He was such a good person, and he has now gone to his reward." How often this has been said about a departed loved one as though God was obligated to take him to Heaven as a reward for doing good! Comforting as this may be to those left behind, such presumption finds no support in the Scriptures. In fact, confusing **SALVATION** and **REWARDS** denies the very obvious principle in the Word of God that **SALVATION** has always been by grace through faith and never as a result of self effort or good works.

Three basic distinctions between **SALVATION** and **REWARDS** are to be noted.

1. **SALVATION IS A GIFT**—"For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the **GIFT** of God, not of works lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

REWARDS ARE EARNED BY BELIEVERS—

"If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a **REWARD**" (I Corinthians 3:14). "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

2. **SALVATION IS A PRESENT POSSESSION**—"This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son **HATH** life" (I John 5:11-12).

REWARDS TO BELIEVERS IN THE FUTURE—

"Wherefore we labor, that whether present or absent, we may be acceptable of Him. For we must all appear before the **JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST**; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:9-10).

3. **SALVATION IS RECEIVED BY FAITH**—"Therefore being justified by **FAITH**, **WE HAVE PEACE WITH** God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

REWARDS TO BELIEVERS FOR FAITHFULNESS—

"Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found **FAITHFUL**" (I Corinthians 4:1-2).

Baptism, Real and Ritual

Whenever the subject of BAPTISM is mentioned, nearly everyone thinks of the water ceremony or rite. What is often overlooked is that the New Testament enumerates at least 12 different kinds of BAPTISMS, only 5 of which have anything to do with water. Theologians refer to spiritual baptism as the "REAL," since it designates the work of God; while the water ceremony, being the work of man, is called "RITUAL" baptism. Failure to distinguish between these two basic "BAPTISMS" is detrimental to sound Godly living.

"RITUAL" baptism was practiced by Israel in the Old Testament (Exodus 30:17-21) at the induction into the priesthood. Since Israel was prophesied to be a nation of priests (Exodus 19:5-6, I Peter 2:9), John the Baptist came baptizing with water (John 1:31). Christ was numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12) both in His "RITUAL" baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) in the Jordan River and His death baptism (Luke 12:50) on the cross.

The Twelve Apostles were instructed that "RITUAL" baptism was required under the so-called "Great Commission" (Mark 16:16). Consequently, Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and announced to the people of Israel, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Failing to repent, the nation was temporarily set aside and with it, the "RITUAL" baptisms and sign gifts.

With the raising up of Paul, God's secret purpose for this age was revealed. Only once in Paul's epistles is "RITUAL" baptism mentioned, and that is in connection with a denominational quarrel (I Corinthians 1:11-17). Instead, we have the Apostle's teaching that "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body..." (I Corinthians 12:13) and "as many...as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). This is "REAL" baptism, whereby every true believer in Jesus Christ is identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-6). Appropriating this fact by faith is a guarantee of spiritual victory. May we not nullify this victory by reading the "RITUAL" into the "REAL."

Gospel of Kingdom—Gospel of Grace

A friend meets us on the street and asks, "Have you heard the good news?" Not knowing to what he is referring, we automatically reply, "What good news?" His detailed explanation lets us in on the happy turn of events, and we rejoice with him. This has happened to all of us.

The Bible word for "good news" is GOSPEL. Many proclamations of "the gospel" are found on its sacred pages. In the New Testament alone, five are mentioned by name. That these are not all the same should be obvious. Even a casual reading of the context will make this clear. Yet one often hears it said in fundamental circles that "there is just one GOSPEL." We challenge our readers to search the Scriptures and see if this is true.

The two principle New Testament GOSPELS are designated as THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM and THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD. Let us note the subject and object of each.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM was proclaimed by John the Baptist, Christ, and the Twelve Apostles (Matthew 3:1-2, 4:23, 10:7). Its subject was the good news that God was going to fulfil His promise to David (II Samuel 7:16-17) and give to the nation Israel an everlasting Kingdom on the earth with Christ as King. This glad message will yet be preached in all the world before the King returns to set up the Kingdom. (See Matthew 24:14.)

THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD was first proclaimed by the Apostle Paul. Received by revelation from the Glorified Lord in Heaven (Acts 20:24, Galatians 1:11-12, Ephesians 3:1-9), its grand subject is the Finished Work of Christ (I Corinthians 15:3-4).

Salvation is offered for the first time to ALL alike and *apart* from the works of the Law (Acts 13:38-39). Instead of spiritual **and** material blessings on earth in this life, those who receive this good news are promised a glorified body and a home in Heaven in the life to come (Philippians 3:20-21).

When Israel refused the GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM, the GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD was unveiled. Now, the Apostle says by the Spirit, "If any man preach any other GOSPEL than that ye have received (THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD), let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9).

Taken Away or Caught up—Which?

In Matthew 24:37-42, we are told that conditions on the earth prior to the Lord's coming will be similar to those in Noah's day. The record in Genesis 6:5-7 states that "the thoughts of men's hearts were only evil continually," and "God repented that He had made man." An honest appraisal of present-day morals must conclude that we are fast heading in the same direction. To the Lord's people, however, it is a comforting thought that when evil has reached its zenith, God always calls a halt. It was so in Noah's day. While the multitude of people were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," completely indifferent to their eternal welfare, the flood came suddenly and "took them all away." Only Noah and his family were spared because they had entered the ark. Those who were "taken," died in the flood.

"So shall the coming of the Son of Man be," said the Lord Jesus Christ. "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left."

Taken where? Not to Heaven, as is sometimes taught, but into judgment...The one who is left will go into the Millennial Kingdom which Christ will have come to establish.

To God's people in this evil age, the Apostle Paul, by inspiration, tells of a secret coming of Christ (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, I Corinthians 15:51-52). Then, instead of being "taken away," members of the Body of Christ will be "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air, and "so shall we ever be with the Lord." How wonderful to have this hope of being "caught up" and not "taken away"! It can be yours by believing the Gospel and trusting the Saviour. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Corinthians 5:21). "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

*"It shall greatly help ye
to understand Scripture if
thou mark not only what
is spoken or writhen, but
of whom and to whom, with
what words, at what time,
where, to what intent, with
what circumstances, con-
sidering what goeth before
and what followeth after."*

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