

What Is Meant by “Rightly Dividing the Word of the Truth?”

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

“Be diligent to present thyself approved to God -- a workman irreproachable, rightly dividing the word of the truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

I will begin by stating one of the logical premises upon which my answer is built, which is that the Bible is not, and never was, inerrant and infallible. This being the case, in what way might it nevertheless have been inspired by God and useful for equipping us for God’s work and living useful, productive lives.

Paul’s words above do not necessarily prove that he believed in the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not have to be inerrant in every respect in order to convey to us truths about God and how we should be applying them in our lives. Paul did say that the authors wrote under the guidance and inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Is it possible that the Scriptures might be truly inspired by God, and at the same time contain many scientific, historical, and theological inaccuracies? If so, we must assume that God put them there, or allowed them to be there, for a purpose.

In the Bible we find a record of mankind’s mistakes and successes, triumphs and defeats, good ideas and bad ideas, right thinking and wrong thinking, good theology and bad theology. The Bible is a record of learning by painful trial and error what God is really like and how we should be conducting our lives. It has been said that those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it. Failures are an important part of any significant learning process. The “bad stuff” is there in order to provide a proper context in which to understand and appreciate the “good stuff.”

“Rightly dividing the Word of the Truth” has nothing to do with giving equal value and weight to every single word contained in the Scriptures. It has more to do with dividing the “good words” from the “bad ones,” based on common sense and the lessons of history. We should be taking our clues from Jesus, who was a master at cherry-picking the Bible, separating the wheat from the chaff, as it were, and mining out the precious nuggets, the timeless truths that most of us agree on, regardless of our views about Scriptural inerrancy.

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