RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

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A SERMON
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"Rightly dividing the word of truth."
2 Timothy 2:15

TIMOTHY was to divide rightly the Word of God. Every Christian minister must do if he would make full proof of his ministry, and if he would be clear of the blood of his hearers at the last great day. Of the whole twenty years of my printed sermons, I can honestly say that this has been my aim—rightly to divide the Word of truth. Wherein I have succeeded, I magnify the name of the Lord. Wherein I have failed, I lament my faultiness. And now once more, we will try again, and may God the Holy Spirit, without whose power nothing can be done aright, help us rightly to divide the Word of truth.

The expression is a very remarkable one, because it bears so many phases of meaning. I do not think that any one of the figures by which I shall illustrate it will be at all strained, for they have been drawn from the text by most eminent expositors, and may fairly be taken as honest comments, even when they might be challenged as correct interpretations of the text.

"Rightly dividing the word of truth" is our authorized version, but we leave it for a little to consider other renderings. Timothy was neither to mutilate, nor twist, nor torture, nor break in pieces the Word of God, nor keep on the outside of it, as those do who never touch the soul of a text, but rightly to divide it, as one taught of God to teach others.

I. The Vulgate version translates it—and with a considerable degree of accuracy—"Rightly HANDLING the word of truth."

What is the right way, then, to handle the Word of truth? It is like a sword, and *it was not meant to be played with*. That is not rightly to handle the Gospel. It must be used in earnest and pushed home. Are you converted, my friends? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Are you saved, or not? Swords are meant to cut and hack, wound, and kill with—and the Word of truth is for pricking men in the heart and killing their sins.

The Word of God is not committed to God's ministers to amuse men with its glitter, nor to charm them with the jewels in its hilt, but to conquer their souls for Jesus. Remember, dear hearers, if the preacher does not push you to this—that you shall be converted, or he will know the reason why. If he does not drive you to this—that you shall either willfully reject, or cheerfully accept Christ—he has not yet known how rightly to handle the great "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Now, then, where are you personally at this moment? Are you unbelievers, upon whom the wrath of God abides, or are you believers, who may lay claim to that gracious word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath everlasting life"? Oh that the Lord would make His all-discerning Word go round this place, and strike at every conscience, and lay bare every heart with its mighty power.

He that rightly handles the Word of God will *never use it to defend men in their sins*, but to slay their sins. If there be a professing Christian here who is living in known sin, shame upon him. And if there be a non-Christian man who is living in sin, let his conscience upbraid him. What will he do in that day when Christ comes to judge the hearts of men, and the books shall be opened, and every thought shall be read out before an assembled universe.

I desire to handle the Word of God so that no man may ever find an excuse in my ministry for his living without Christ, and living in sin, but may know clearly that sin is a deadly evil, and unbelief the

sure destroyer of the soul. He has indeed been made to handle the Word aright who plunges it like a two-edged sword into the very bowels of sin.

The Gospel ought *never to be used for frightening sinners from Christ*. I believe it is so handled sometimes. Sublime doctrines are rolled like rocks in the sinner's way, and dark experiences set up as a standard of horror which must be reached before a man may believe in Jesus. But rightly to handle the Word of life is to frighten men *to* Christ rather than *from* Him—yea, to woo them to Him by the sweet assurance that He will cast out none that come, that He asks no preparations of them, but if they come at once, as they are, He will assuredly receive them.

Have I not handled the Word of truth in this way hundreds of times in this house? Has it not been a great magnet attracting sinners? As a magnet has two poles, and with one pole it repels, so, no doubt, the truth of God repels the prejudiced, rebellious heart—and thus, it is a savor of death unto death. But our object is so to handle it that the attractive pole may come into operation through the power of the Spirit of God, and men may be drawn to Christ.

Moreover, if we rightly handle the Word of God, *we shall not preach it so as to send Christians into a sleepy state*. That is easily done. We may preach the consolations of the Gospel till each professor feels, "I am safe enough. There is no need to watch, no need to fight, no need for any exertion whatever. My battle is fought, my victory is won. I have only to fold my arms and go to sleep."

No, no, men, this is not how we handle the Word of God, but our cry is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Reckon not yourselves to have attained unto perfection, but forget the things that are behind, and reach forward to that which is before, ever looking unto Jesus." This is rightly to handle the Word of God.

And oh, beloved, there is one thing that I dread above all others—lest I should ever handle the Word of God *so as to persuade some of you that you are saved when you are not*. To collect a large number of professors together is one thing. But to have a large number of true saints built together in Christ is quite another. To get up a whirl of excitement, and to have people influenced by that excitement, so that they think full surely that they are converted, has been done a great many times. But the bubble, has, by and by, vanished. The balloon has been filled until it has burst. God save us from that.

We want sure work—lasting work—a work of divine grace in the heart. If you are not converted, pray do not pretend that you are. If you have not known what it is to be brought down to see your own nothingness, and then to be built up by the power of the Spirit upon Christ as the only foundation, O, remember that whatever is built upon the quicksand will fall with a crash in the hour of trial. Do not be satisfied with anything short of a deep foundation, cut in the solid rock of the work of Jesus Christ. Ask for real vital godliness, for nothing else will serve your turn at the last great day.

Now, this is rightly to handle the Word of God—to use it to push the truth home upon men for their present conversion, to use it for the striking down of their sins, to use it to draw men to Christ, to use it to arouse sinners, and to use it to produce, not mere profession, but a real work of grace in the hearts of men. May the Holy Ghost teach all the ministers of Christ after this fashion to handle the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

II. But now, secondly, my text has another meaning. It has an idea in it which I can only express by a figure. "Rightly dividing or STRAIGHT CUTTING."

A ploughman stands here with his plough and he ploughs right along from this end of the field to the other, making a straight furrow. And so Paul would have Timothy make a straight furrow right through the Word of truth. I believe there is no preaching that God will ever accept, but that which goes decidedly through the whole line of truth from end to end, is always thorough, honest, and downright.

As the truth is a straight line, so must our handling of the truth be straightforward and honest, without shifts or tricks. There are two or three furrows which I have labored hard to plough. One is the furrow of *free grace*. "Salvation is of the LORD"—He begins it, He carries it on, He completes it. Salvation is not of man, neither by man, but of grace alone. Grace in election, grace in redemption, grace

in effectual calling, grace in final perseverance, grace in conferring the perfection of glory—it is all grace from beginning to end.

If we say, at any time anything which is really contrary to this distinct testimony that salvation is of grace, believe us not. This furrow must be ploughed fairly, plainly, and beyond all mistake. Sinner, you cannot be saved by any merit, penance, preparation, or feeling of your own. The Lord alone must save you as a work of gratis mercy, not because you deserve it, but because He wills to do it to magnify His abundant love. That is the straight furrow of the Word.

We endeavor always to make a straight furrow upon the matter of *human depravity*—to preach that man is fallen, that every part and passion of his nature is perverted, that he has gone astray altogether, is sick from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet—yea, is dead in trespasses and sins, and corrupt before God.

"There is none that doeth good, no, not one." I have noticed some preachers ploughing this furrow very crookedly, for they say, "There are some very fine points about man still, and many good things in him which only need developing and educating." You may have read, in the history of Mr. Whitfield's time, what a howl was made at him because he once said that man was half beast and half devil.

I do not think he ever got nearer the truth than when he said that—only I would beg the beast's pardon—for a beast would scarcely become so evil and vile as human nature becomes when it is left alone fully to develop itself. O pride of human nature, we plough right over you! The hemlock stands in your field and must be cut up by the roots. Your weeds smile like fair flowers, but the ploughshare must go right through them till all human beauty is shown to be a painted Jezebel, and all human glorying a bursting bubble. God is everything, man is nothing. God in His grace saves man, but man by his sin utterly ruins himself until God's grace interposes. I like to plough a straight furrow here.

Another straight furrow is that of *faith*. We are sent to tell men that he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, and our duty is to put it so. "Salvation is not of works"—works is not the furrow. Not of prayers—that is not the furrow. Not of feelings—that is not the Gospel furrow. Not of preparations and amendments and reforms—but by faith in Jesus Christ. He that believes on Him is not condemned.

As we begin the new life by faith, we must abide in it by faith. We are not to be saved by faith up to a certain point, and then to rely upon ourselves. Having begun in the Gospel, we are not to be perfected by the law. "The just shall live by faith." We live by faith at the wicket gate, and we live by faith until we enter into our eternal rest.

Believe!—that is the grand Gospel precept, and we trust we have never gone out of this furrow, but have tried to plough right across the Gospel field from end to end, crying, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for JEHOVAH is God, and beside him there is none else."

Another furrow which some do not much like to plough, but which must be distinctly marked if a man is an honest ploughman for God, is that of *repentance*. Sinner, you and your sins must part. You have been married long, and you have had a merry time of it, perhaps, but you must part. You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together. Not one sin may you keep. They must all be given up.

They must be brought out like the Canaanite kings from the cave and hanged up before the sun. Not one darling must be spared. You must forsake them, loathe them, abhor them, and ask the Lord to overcome them. Do you not know that the furrow of repentance runs right through the Christian's life? He sins, and as long as he sins, he repents of his sin. The child of God cannot love sin—he must loathe it as long as he sees any of it in existence.

There is the furrow of *holiness*, that is the next turn the ploughman takes. "Without holiness no man shall see the LORD." We have preached salvation by grace, but we do not preach salvation to those who still continue in sin. The children of God are a holy people—washed, purged, sanctified, and made zealous for good works. And he who talks about faith, and has no works to prove that his faith is a living faith, lies to himself and lies before God.

It is faith that saves us, not works—but the faith that saves us always produces works. It renews the heart, changes the character, influences the motives, and is the means in the hand of God of making the man a new creature in Christ Jesus. No nonsense about it, sirs—you may be baptized and re-baptized, you may attend to sacraments, or you may believe in an orthodox creed—but you will be damned if you live in sin.

You may become a deacon, or an elder, or a minister, if you dare, but there is no salvation for any man who still harbors his sins. "The wages of sin is death"—death to professors as well as to non-professors. If they hug their sins in secret, God will reveal those sins in public, and condemn them according to the strict justice of His law.

These are the furrows we have tried to plough—deep, sharp cut, and straight. O that God might plough them Himself in all your hearts that you may know experientially how the truth is rightly divided.

III. There is a third meaning to the text. "Rightly dividing the word of truth" is, as some think, an expression taken from the priests dividing the sacrifices. When they had a lamb or a sheep, a ram or a bullock to offer, after they had killed it, it was cut in pieces, carefully and properly. And it requires no little skill to find out where the joints are, so as to cut up an animal discreetly.

Now, the Word of truth has to be taken to pieces wisely—it is not to be hacked or torn as by a wild beast, but rightly divided. There has to be DISCRIMINATION AND DISSECTION. It is a great part of a minister's duty to be able to dissect the Gospel—to lay one piece there, and another there, and preach with clearness, distinction, and discrimination.

Every Gospel minister must divide between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It is a very nice point that, and many fail to discern it well, but it must always be kept clear, or great mischief will be done. Confusion worse confounded follows upon confusing grace and law.

There is the covenant of works—"This do, and thou shalt live," but its voice is not that of the covenant of grace which says, "Hear and your soul shall live." "You shall, for I will"—that is the covenant of grace. It is a covenant of pure promise unalloyed by terms and conditions.

I have heard people put it thus—"Believers will be saved if from this time forth they are faithful to grace given." That savors of the covenant of works. "God will love you"—says another—"*if you*—." Ah, the moment you get an "*if*" in it, it is the covenant of works and the Gospel has evaporated. Oil and water will sooner mix than merit and grace.

When you find the covenant of works anywhere, what are you to do with it? Why, do what Abraham did, and what Sarah demanded, "Cast out the bond-woman and her son, for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

If you are a child of the free-grace promise, do not suffer the Hagar and Ishmael of legal bondage and carnal hope to live in your house. Out with them. You have nought to do with them. Let law and Gospel keep their proper places. The law is school-master to bring us to Christ, but when we have come to Christ, we are no longer under a school-master. Let the law principle go its way to work conviction in sinners, and destroy their ill-grounded hopes, but you abide in Christ Jesus even as you have received Him.

If you are to be saved by works, then it is not of grace, otherwise work is no more work. And if saved by grace, then it is not of human merit, otherwise grace is no more grace. To keep clear here is of the first importance, for on the rocks of legality many a soul has been cast away.

We need also to keep up a clear distinction between the efforts of nature and the work of grace. It is commendable for men to do all they can to improve themselves, and everything by which people are made more sober, more honest, more frugal, better citizens, better husbands, better wives, is a good thing. But that is nature and not grace. Reformation is not regeneration. "Ye must be born again," still stands for the good as well as for the bad.

To be made a new creature in Christ Jesus is as necessary for the moral as for the debauched, for when flesh has done its best, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"—and men must be born of the Spirit, or they cannot understand spiritual things, or enter into heaven.

I have always tried to keep up this distinction, and I trust none of you will ever mistake the efforts of nature for the works of divine grace. Do what you can for human reformation, for whatsoever things are honest and of good repute you are to foster, but still, never put the most philanthropic plan, or the most elevating system in the place of the work of sovereign grace, for if you do, you will do ten times as much mischief as you can possibly do good. We must rightly divide the Word of truth.

It is always well, too, for Christian men to be able to distinguish one truth from another. Let the knife penetrate between the joints of the work of Christ for us, and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Justification, by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, is one blessing. Sanctification, by which we ourselves are made personally righteous, is another blessing.

I have known some describe sanctification as a sort of foundation, or at least a buttress for the work of justification. Now, no man is justified because he is sanctified—he is justified because he believes in Him that justifies the ungodly. Sanctification follows justification. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the soul of a believer, who first of all was justified by believing in Jesus while as yet he was unsanctified.

Give Jesus Christ all the glory for His great and perfect work, and remember that you are perfect in Christ Jesus and accepted in the Beloved. But at the same time, give glory to the Holy Spirit, and remember that you are not yet perfect in holiness, but that the Spirit's work is to be carried on and will be carried on all the days of your life.

One other point of rightly dividing should never be forgotten—we must always distinguish between the root and the fruit. He is a very poor botanist who does not know a bulb from a bud, but I believe that there are some Londoners who do not know which are roots and which are fruits, so little have they seen of anything growing.

And I am sure there are some theologians who hardly know which is the cause and which is the effect in spiritual things. Putting the cart before the horse is a very absurd thing, but many do it. Hear how people will say—"If I could feel joy in the Lord, I would believe." Yes, that is the cart before the horse, for joy is the result of faith, not the reason for it.

"But I want to feel a great change of heart, and then I will believe." Just so—you wish to make the fruit the root. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," that is the root of the matter. Change of life and joy in the Lord will spring up as gracious fruits of faith, and not otherwise. When will you discriminate?

Thus, I have given you three versions of my text—rightly handling, straightly furrowing, and wisely discriminating.

IV. The next interpretation of the apostle's expression is practically CUTTING OUT the Word for holy uses.

This is the sense given by Chrysostom. I will show you what I mean here. Suppose I have a skin of leather before me and I want to make a saddle. I take a knife and begin cutting out the shape. I do not want those parts which are dropping off on the right, and round this corner—they are very good leather, but I cannot, just now, make use of them. I have to cut out my saddle, and I make that my one concern.

Or suppose I have to make a pair of reins out of the leather. I must take my knife round, and work away with one object, keeping clearly before me what I am aiming at. The preacher, to be successful, must also have his wits about him. And when he has the Bible before him he must use those portions which will have a bearing upon his grand aim. He must make use of the material laid ready to his hand in the Bible.

Every portion of the Word of God is very blessed and exceedingly profitable, but it may not happen to be connected with the preacher's immediate subject, and therefore he leaves it to be considered another time. And though some will upbraid him for it, he is much too sensible to feel bound to preach

all the doctrines of the Bible in each sermon. He wants to have souls saved and Christians quickened, and, therefore, he does not forever pour out the vials and blow the trumpets of prophecy.

Some hearers are crazy after the mysteries of the future. Well, there are two or three brethren in London who are always trumpeting and vialing. Go and hear them if you want it, I have something else to do. I confess I am not sent to decipher the apocalyptic symbols—my errand is humbler, but equally as useful—I am sent to bring souls to Jesus Christ.

There are preachers who are always dealing with the deep things, the very deep things. For them the coral caves of mystery, and the far descending shafts of metaphysics have a mighty charm. I have no quarrel with their tastes, but I do not think the Word of God was given us to be a riddle book. To me, the plain Gospel is the part which I cut out, and rightly cut out of the Word of God.

There is a soul that wants to know how to find peace with God. Some other brother can tell him where predestination falls in with free agency, I do not pretend to know. But I do know that faith in Jesus brings peace to the heart. My business is to bring forth that which will save souls, build up saints, and set Christians to work for Christ. I leave the mysteries, not because I despise them, but because the times demand that we first, and above all other things, seek the souls of men.

Some truths press to be heard. They must be heard now, or men will be lost. The other truths they can hear tomorrow or by and by, but *now* escape from hell and fitness for heaven are their immediate business.

Fancy the angels sitting down with Lot and his daughters, inside Sodom, and discussing predestination with them, or explaining the limits of free agency. No, no, they cry, "Come along," and they take them by the arm and lead them out, saying, "Flee, flee, flee, for fire is coming down from heaven, and this city is to be destroyed."

This is what the preacher has to do—leaving certain parts of truth for other times, he is now rightly dividing the Word of truth when he brings out that which is of pressing importance. In the Bible, there are some things that are essential, without which a man cannot be saved at all. There are other things which are important, but still men are saved, notwithstanding their ignorance of those things.

Is it not clear that the essentials must have prominence? Every truth ought to be preached in its turn and place, but we must never give the first place to a second truth, or push that to the front which was meant to be in the background of the picture. "We preach Christ," said the apostle, "Christ and him crucified," and I believe that if the preacher is rightly to divide the Word, he will say to the sinner, "Sinner, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ intercedes. Look to Him. As for the difficult questions and nice points, leave them for awhile. You shall discuss them by and by, so far as they are profitable to you, but just now believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the main matter."

The preacher must thus separate the vital from the secondary, the practical from the speculative, and the pressing and immediate from that which may be lawfully delayed. And in that sense, he will rightly divide the Word of truth.

V. I have given you four meanings. Now, I will give you another, leaving out some I might have mentioned. One thing the preacher has to do is to ALLOT TO EACH ONE HIS PORTION.

And here the figure changes. According to Calvin, the intention of the Spirit here is to represent one who is the steward of the house, and has to apportion food to the different members of the family. He has rightly to divide the loaves so as not to give the little children and the babes all the crust. Rightly to supply each one's necessities, not giving the strong men milk, nor the babes hard diet—not casting the children's bread to the dogs, nor giving the swine's husks to the children, but placing before each his own portion. Let me try and do it.

Child of God, your portion is the whole Word of God. Every promise in it is yours. Take it. Feed on it. Christ is yours. God is yours. The Holy Spirit is yours. This world is yours, and worlds to come. Time is yours. Eternity is yours. Life is yours. Death is yours. Everlasting glory is yours. There is your portion. It is very sweet to give you your royal meat. The Lord gives you a good appetite. Feed on it. Feed on it.

Sinner, you who believe not in Jesus, none of this is yours. While you remain as you are, the threatenings are yours. If you refuse to believe in Jesus, neither this life nor the next is yours, nor time, nor eternity. You have nothing good.

O, how dreadful is your portion now, for the wrath of God abides on you. O, that you were wise, that your character might be changed, for until it is, we dare not flatter you. There is not a promise for you, nor a single approving sentence. You get your food to eat and your raiment to put on, but even that is given to you by the abounding long-suffering of God and it may become a curse to you unless you repent.

I am sorry to bring you such a portion, but I must be honest with you. That is all that I can give you. God has said it—it is an awful sentence—"I will *curse* their *blessings*." O, sinner, the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.

We have also to divide a portion to the *mourners*, and O, how sweet a task that is, to say to those that mourn in Zion that the Lord will give them beauty for ashes. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." The Lord will restore peace unto His mourners. Fear not, neither be dismayed, for the Lord will help you.

But when we have given the mourners their sweet meats, we have to turn round upon the *hypocrites* and say to them, "You may hang your heads like bulrushes. You may rend your garments and pretend to fast, but the Lord, who knows your heart, will suddenly come and unmask you. And if you are not sincere before Him—if you are weighed in the balances and found wanting—He will deal out the gall of bitterness to you forever. For His mourners, there is mercy, but for the deceiver and the hypocrite, there is judgment without mercy."

It is a very pleasant thing, moreover, to deal out a portion to the *seeker*—when we say, "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," says Christ, "for I will give you rest." Take your portion and be glad.

We have to turn round, and say to others who think they are seekers, but *who are delaying*, "How long halt ye wait between two opinions?" How is it that you continually hesitate and refuse to believe in Jesus, and stay in the condition of unbelief, when the Gospel mandate is, "Believe—believe now and live!"

So we have to give to one comfort, to another counsel—to one reproof, to another encouragement—to one the invitation, to another the warning. And this is to rightly divide the Word of truth.

Yes, and sometimes God enables His servants to give the Word very remarkably to some men. I believe that if I were to tell a few of the things which have happened to me during the last one-and-twenty years, they would not be believed. Or if I were to tell you of passages of history which are known to me that have occurred in this Tabernacle to people who have come here, and to whom I have spoken the exact word, not knowing them for a moment, the facts would sound like fictions.

I will give you one instance. Some of you will remember my preaching from the text, "What if thy father answer thee roughly?" There came into the vestry after that sermon a venerable Christian gentleman, bringing with him a young foreigner whom he was anxious to satisfy upon one point.

He said, "Sir, I want you kindly to answer this question—have you seen me concerning this young gentlemen?" "No, sir, certainly not," I said. And assuredly, though I knew the gentleman who addressed me, he had never spoken to me about the foreign stranger whose very existence was, up to that moment unknown to me.

Said he, "This young gentleman is almost persuaded to be a Christian. His father is of quite another faith, and worships other gods, and our young friend knows that if he becomes a Christian he will lose his father's love. I said to him, when he conversed with me, come down and hear Mr. Spurgeon this morning.

"Here we came, and your text was, 'What if your father answer thee roughly?' Now, have you ever heard a word from me about this young gentleman?" "No, never," I said. "Well," said the young man,

"it is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life." I could only say, "I trust it is the voice of God to your soul. God knows how to guide His servants to utter the word most fitted to bless men."

Some time ago a town missionary had in his district a man who never would suffer any Christian person to come into his house. The missionary was warned by many that he would get a broken head if he ventured on a visit. He therefore kept from the house, though it troubled his conscience to pass it by.

He made a matter of prayer of it, and one morning, he boldly ventured into the lion's den, and the man said, "What have you come here for?" "Well, sir," he said, "I have been conversing with people in all the houses along here, but I have passed you by because I heard you objected to it. But somehow I thought it looked cowardly to avoid you, and therefore I have called."

"Come in," the man said. "Sit down, sit down. Now, you are going to talk to me about the Bible. Perhaps you do not know much about it yourself. I am going to ask you a question, and if you can answer me, you shall come again. If you do not answer it, I will bundle you downstairs. Now," said he, "do you understand me?" "Yes," said the other, "I do take you."

"Well, then," said he, "this is the question—where do you find the word '*girl*' in the Bible, and how many times do you find it?" The city missionary said, "The word 'girl' occurs only once in the Bible, and that is in the Book of Joel, the third chapter and the third verse. 'They sold a girl for wine.'" "You are right," said he, "but I would not have believed you knew it, or else I would have asked you some other question. You may come again."

"But," said the missionary, "I should like you to know how I came to know it. This very morning I was praying for direction from God, and when I was reading my morning chapter, I came upon this passage, 'And they sold a girl for wine,' and I took down my Concordance to see whether the word 'girl' was to be found anywhere else. I found that the word 'girls' occurs in the passage, 'There shall be girls and boys playing in the streets of Jerusalem,' but the word did not occur as 'girl' anywhere but in Joel."

The result, however, of that story, however odd it seems, was that the missionary was permitted to call, and the man took an interest in his visits. And the whole family were the better—the man and his wife, and one of his children becoming members of a Christian church some time afterwards.

What an extraordinary thing it seems, yet I can assure you that such extraordinary things are as commonplaces in my experience. God does help His servants rightly to divide the Word, that is to say, to allot a special portion to each special case, so that it comes upon the man as if everything about him was known.

Before I came to London, a man met me one Sunday, in a dreadful state of rage. He vowed he would horsewhip me for bullying him from the pulpit. What had I said, I asked. "What have you said? You looked me in the face and said, 'What more can God do for you? Shall He give you a good wife? You have had one—you have killed her by bad treatment. You have just got another, and you are likely to do the same by her.'"

"Well," I said, "did you kill your first wife by your bad treatment?" "They say so, but I was married on Saturday," said he. "Did you not know it?" "No, I did not, I assure you," I replied. "I have no knowledge whatever of your family matters, and I am sure I wish you joy with your new wife."

He cooled down a great deal, but I believe that I had struck the nail on the head that time—that he had killed his wife with his unkindness, and he scarcely liked to bring his new wife to the place of worship to be told of it. The cap fitted him. And if any cap fits you, I pray you wear it, for so far from shrinking from being personal, I do assure you I try to be as personal as ever I can, for I long to see the Word go home to every man's conscience, and convict him and make him tremble before God, and confess his sin and forsake it.

VI. You must give me a few more minutes while I take the last point, which is this. Rightly to divide the Word of truth means to TELL EACH MAN WHAT HIS LOT AND HERITAGE WILL BE IN ETERNITY.

Just as when Canaan was conquered, it was divided by lot among the tribes, so the preacher has to tell of Canaan, that happy land, but he has to tell of the land of darkness and of death-shade, and to let each man know where his last abode will be. You do know it. You who come here do know it. Need I repeat a story that we have gone over and over a thousand times?

As many as believe in Jesus and are renewed in heart, and are kept by the grace of God through faith unto salvation, shall inherit eternal life. But as for those who believe not on God, who reject His Son, who abide in their sins—there remains nothing for them but, "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation." "The wicked shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God." "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." "Beware," says God—"Beware, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver." O, the wrath to come! The wrath to come!

Believer, there is your portion—in the blessed land. Sinner, except you repent, there is your portion—in the land of darkness and of weeping, and of wailing, and of gnashing of teeth.

I take a religious newspaper from America, and the last copy I had of it bore on it these words at the end, in good large type, printed in a practical, business-like, American way—"If you do not want to have this paper, discontinue it NOW. If you wish to have it for the year 1875, send your subscription NOW. If you have any complaint against it, send your complaint NOW. If you have removed, send a notice of your change of residence NOW."

There was a big "NOW" at the end of every sentence. As I read it, I thought, well, that is right. That is common sense. And it struck me that I would say to you on this last Sunday night of the year, if you wish to forsake your sins, forsake them NOW. If you would have mercy from God through Jesus Christ, believe on Him NOW. What fitter time than ere the dying year is gone—NOW, NOW, NOW?

In that very paper, I read a story concerning Messrs. Moody and Sankey on the same point. The story is that, while they were preaching in Edinburgh, there was a man sitting opposite to them who was very deeply interested, and was drinking it all in. There was a pause in the service and the man went out with his friend, but when he reached the door he stopped and his friend said, "Come away, Jamie." "No," he said, "I will go back. I came here to get good to my soul and I have not taken it all in yet, I must go back again."

He went back, and sat in his old place, and listened again. The Lord blessed him. He found Christ and so found salvation. Being a miner, he went down the pit the next day to his work, and a mass of rock fell on him. He was taken out, but he could not recover. He said to the man who was helping him out, "O, Andrew, I am so glad it was all settled last night. Oh, mon," said he, "it was all settled last night."

Now, I hope those people who were killed in the railway accident on Christmas Eve could say—"It was all settled the night before." What a blessed thing it will be for you, if you should meet with an accident tomorrow, to say, "Blessed be God, it was all settled last night. I gave any heart to Jesus, I yielded myself to His divine love and mercy, and I am saved." O Holy Spirit, grant it may be so, and You shall have the praise. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 TIMOTHY 2

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—1,041, 960

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

Read at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, on Lord's Day, February 14, 1875

BELOVED FRIENDS—Instead of journeying to the sunny south, I have been a prisoner in my chamber all the week, making the sixth week of my affliction, and completing more than forty days of quarantine. In this I see the hand of the Lord, and cheerfully submit to His will. Why should a living man complain? Why should a child of God even think of doing so?

I have been much cheered to hear of the success of the week of special services, held at the Tabernacle, and am pleading with God that the second week may be yet more fruitful of results. Join with me in the earnest intercession.

Prayer and effort, presented in faith, will secure us a great and lasting blessing. *Do not let anything flag, I pray you, of any sort, in any department of labor.* Both in labor and gifts abound more and more. Many would like to make out that the work at the Tabernacle all depends on me, and is not of a permanent character. I want them to be forced to see that the Lord's hand is so gloriously with you, and that there is such depth of piety among the members, that the temporary absence of the Pastor proves rather a stimulus to greater exertion than an excuse for slackness. It has been so until now, and it will be so.

I would, with much deference to the divine will, now venture to ask for restored health, and if the church and all my friends would unitedly ask this for me, it may be the Lord would remove His rod from me. Be it according to His will.

Peace be with all who are in Christ Jesus, but what shall I say to those out of Christ? What peace can be to them?

Yours very heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.