**Knowing the Will of God**

*by Harry Osborne*

It is a fundamental fact that God does not deliver His truth through a subjective experience, but through the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:14-17). Thus, if we are to accept anything in moral or religious matters as “truth,” it must be in agreement with God’s revealed will in Scripture. In any realm, if something deviates from known fact or truth, it must be false. We recognize this in mathematics, grammar, science or any other discipline. Why do people not use the same simple logic when trying to determine if the teaching they hear in the religious world is the truth of God's will?

When a man behind a microphone or a television camera purports to speak for God, why do otherwise rational people blindly accept his word rather than comparing his teaching to the known source of God's will -- the Scripture? Denominational preachers and other teachers of error are characterized by diverting a hearer's attention away from the fact that their teaching is at odds with the plain statements of God's word. They tell the hearer that people cannot understand the Bible alike and that it was never intended as the source for unity. Thus, the modern pulpits and airwaves are filled with preachers asking us to trust them to guide us to God's will. They would have us cease efforts to eliminate error and promote truth by depending on the Bible. How does God declare His will?

Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 2:15 will help us to answer our questions about what God expects of us and how we can know His will. The Bible says:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The word translated **"rightly dividing"** refers to **teaching accurately or expounding soundly**. Thus, God teaches us something through the Bible and we are to accurately determine what that message is. Unlike the teaching done by many in the denominational world, the Bible says that we can understand the will of God. We are told, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Other passages confirm that we can and must come to a knowledge of God's truth (2 Pet. 1:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jn. 7:17; Matt. 7:7-8).

This end can only be reached as one is "diligent" in using God's word. The King James Version uses the word "study" to translate the word rendered "be diligent" in most other English versions of the Bible. The original word carried the sense of "making every effort" to do a thing. This does not suggest a lackadaisical and indolent approach to Bible study. One is not diligent in the use of the Bible when he casually looks at it for a few moments two or three times a week or less. Diligence demands a systematic and thorough examination of God's word every day of one's life. It requires an intense effort and an exhaustive search of all that God has said within His word. It is never satisfied with learning only part of God's will, but searches for ***all*** that He has said on any subject. If people studied a subject in school or in their jobs as they study Bible subjects, confusion and contradiction would predominate in those areas as well. Understanding the subject and reaching proper conclusions takes intense effort in all areas of life.

Suppose you took a course in Shakespearean literature and spent only 30 minutes reading one part of one play before throwing the book down and saying that Shakespeare cannot be understood. Would such a brief attempt to understand the literature justify the conclusion? Would you expect to get a passing grade in the course after such a brief attempt at understanding? How many hours of diligent study would be necessary to comprehend it? We would surely employ various aids and much time trying to understand the meaning.

We know the same thing is true of seeking knowledge in any area of study, but many expect knowledge of God's truth to be handed to them with little or no effort on their part. A recent studies show that over 80% of Americans professing "Christianity" spend less than 30 minutes each **year** reading their Bibles! How can one expect to understand the Bible with that little effort? One cannot "be diligent" in rightly dividing the word by spending only 30 minutes a day on understanding God's word, much less 30 minutes a year. How much time and effort do we spend reading and studying our Bible?

If we are to please God, we must do as Paul commanded Timothy:

Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you (1 Tim. 4:15-16).

Are these words a fair and accurate description of our habits in Bible study and spiritual growth? The meditation on God's will stated by the apostle Paul as necessary is the same concentration the psalmist declared to be a "day and night" process (Psa. 1:2). The great psalm describing God's word associates diligent effort with the meditation of those who truly seek to serve the Lord (Psa. 119:15-16, 23-24, 97, 147-148). Do these verses characterize you and me? Have we given ourselves "entirely" to the word of God? The description suggests that one must have the pursuit of truth as the preeminent and defining characteristic of his life (cf. Matt. 6:33; Phil. 3:8-14). When one gives himself "entirely" to knowing and obeying the will of God, it is apparent to all around him. Is that how our friends and family would describe you and me? In order to meet the requirements of this passage, we must "take heed" to ourselves. This would necessitate a careful inspection of self to assure that our lives are parallel to God's word (2 Cor. 13:5). We are also required to "take heed" to our doctrine. When is the last time we sat down and carefully thought about the doctrine we believe? This commitment of our entire being to God's commands is not just a one-time obligation, but we are to "continue in them." Are we truly exemplifying this passage in our lives?

We must be as the Bereans of old. The Bible says of them, "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). We need to emulate the nobility of the Bereans by searching the Scriptures every day in our quest to know and obey God's will.

Just as it takes work to study and properly understand a subject in school, it takes work to study and properly understand Bible subjects as well. There is no shortcut that can be substituted for the essential place of diligence in knowing the will of God. If we are to unite in the proper understanding of God's word, it will require a diligent effort in discerning His truth from the revealed word. It does not just suddenly come to us by a “better felt than told” experience or any other subjective means. Neither does it come by letting others do the hard work of study and us expecting to acquire the benefits by a casual, occasional hearing their conclusions. Diligent study cannot be done vicariously. It is a personal pursuit!

We must "be diligent to present ourselves approved to God, as workers who do not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Let us never abuse God's word by improper handling. Instead, we must deeply respect, thoroughly study and properly use it each day.