

We establish the Law Through (the) Faith

by Hendrik Joubert

In his **second** letter to **Timothy (2:15)** **Paul writes: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth***, thereby suggesting that one may handle the word inaccurately. Numerous warnings against false prophets, teachers, preachers, apostles and even christ, confirm the fact that some will handle the word revealed by God inaccurately.

The word translated *accurately handling* literally means *to make a straight cut*, or *to divide*, and that is how it reads in some translations: *rightly dividing*. Both renditions clearly express the idea that one should **not** *wrest*, *twist* or *distort* the word of God. (**2 Peter 3:16**) When considering what the Scriptures teach concerning the two Covenants the concept *rightly dividing* helps one understand that there is indeed a distinction to be made between the Old and the New Testaments, and that one should make that cut straight, or accurately.

Rightly dividing the word of truth is not a blatant cutting off and discarding of a section of the Bible; it is a careful effort to determine what I am supposed to do as I humbly surrender my will to God's. When we allow the Scriptures to speak to us without interruption, we become aware of the wonderful simplicity so eloquently expressed through the apostle Paul in the opening chapter of his **first** letter to the **Corinthians. (1:18-31)**

Making the statement that we do not live under the *authority* of the Old Testament immediately causes discomfort as it suggests that one does not accept what the Old Testament teaches; *Why do you not simply tear it out and throw it away!* However, it is quite simple to illustrate. We do not sacrifice animals anymore, do we? *Yeah, because Jesus was the perfect sacrifice...* So, the unblemished lamb was a foreshadowing of Jesus – we have the *shadow* (the innocent lamb sacrificed for the sins of the people) and the *substance*, Jesus ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*** (**John 1:29**)

In **Colossians 2** God teaches us that the Old Covenant was indeed a *shadow* of the *New*: ***Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day -- ¹⁷ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*** (**16-17**) The idea of a shadow is also mentioned in **Hebrews 10:1**: ***For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.*** (**Hebrews 10:1**)

The New Covenant contains the *substance*, or *very form of things*. The Old was *only a shadow* of what was to come. In **Hebrews 8** God reminds us that He announced the change in Covenants way back through Jeremiah (**31:31ff**), and lets the writer conclude: ***When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.*** (**8:13**)

Through the letter to the Galatians God asks the question: ***Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?*** (**Galatians 4:21**) What follows is a graphic illustration similar to the prophecy made in **Jeremiah 31**. If the people allowed God to speak without interrupting Him with their own views, they would have realized that the law was a temporary measure with a specific purpose – to make the Jews aware of the fact that they are

sinner, as were the nations around them. Law does not save, it condemns by making you aware that you are an offender: ...**because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)**

It is this awareness that causes one to cry out, as every Jew under the law should have: **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24)** The answer is graciously announced immediately. Through Christ sinners are able to enter the true *rest*, of which the Sabbath was a mere shadow. (**Colossians 2**)

The gospel calls sinners to repentance. (**Luke 13:1-5; Acts 2:38**) This *change of mind* concerning sin demands that one works on eliminating it from your life, with the help of God and Christ. ...**but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;** ¹⁶ **because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."** (1 Peter 1:15-16) You become a servant of righteousness. (**Romans 6:16**) The New Covenant addresses the root of the problem: ...**but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28**

Listening to the law brings one to Christ, where true forgiveness is available. When one considers all these factors you are able to understand the words of Paul: **Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. Romans 3:31.** Through the gospel one may overcome the guilt of sin.