



October 29, 2018

When our children were in high school, we received an invitation to the wedding and reception of a dear couple. Our family was delighted with the occasion, but I remember I had to go back and double-check which members of our family were invited. Checking the names on the envelope, I found that it was addressed to my husband and me. The invitation applied to the two of us. Since our children's names were not on the envelope, it did not apply to them; therefore, it would not have been appropriate for them to go. The invitation was addressed only to the two of us, so my husband and I were the ones it applied to. However, that invitation was good learning for our children: they learned of the couple's wedding plans and that my husband and I had been invited.

How does that concept relate to God's Word? All of God's Word is pure, profitable, and powerful. However, the whole Bible is not addressed directly to us. Sections of the Word are addressed to specific categories of people. Knowing to whom a passage of scripture is addressed is a key to rightly dividing the Word so that we correctly understand what God meant in that part of the Scripture and whether it applies to us or is for our learning.

All of the Word of God is addressed to one or a combination of these three categories of people: Judeans, Gentiles, and the Church of God.

1 Corinthians 10:32:

Give none offence, neither to the Jews [Judeans], nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.

Most of the Old Testament is addressed to Judeans (those of Israel). For example, Exodus 3:15 states: "And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel..."

The Gentiles are the Gentile nations, anyone who is not Judean. In the Book of Joel, we see an example of how certain parts of the Word are specifically addressed to the Gentiles. Joel 3:9 states, “Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles...”

The Church of God refers to those in the Grace Administration who are born again of God’s spirit. I Corinthians 1:2 shows that this epistle is addressed “Unto the church of God....”

As born-again believers, we are part of the Church of God. All of God’s Word is for our learning, but not all of it is for our application. To rightly divide God’s Word, we are to specifically apply what is addressed to us. Parts of the Scripture addressed directly to us are the seven Church Epistles: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I and II Thessalonians. These are what we can specifically apply from God’s Word.

The opening of each Church Epistle makes clear that it is written to us, e.g., “To all...called *to be* saints [referring to the born-again believers]...” (Romans 1:7); “...to the saints...and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1); “...unto the church...” (I Thessalonians 1:1).

What is not addressed to us is for our learning.

Romans 15:4:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime [regarding times before the day of Pentecost] were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

The parts of the Bible written regarding times before the day of Pentecost are the Old Testament and the four Gospels. Once we understand that a section of the Word is for our learning, then we can make an accurate application of it as long as its words or principles do not conflict with passages specifically addressed to us in the Church of God.

For example, the following verse is addressed specifically to Israel (Judeans), but it can also be applied by us because nothing addressed to us in the Church Epistles contradicts what it sets forth.

Exodus 23:25:

And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water....

We can apply this because it is still true that when we serve God, He makes sure we are abundantly blessed. But a few chapters later in Exodus, we read a verse that we do not need to apply.

Exodus 29:36:

And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement....

This verse contradicts scriptures addressed to us that tell us Jesus Christ was our sacrifice, such as I Corinthians 5:7, "...For even Christ our passover is [was] sacrificed for us." This verse helps us understand that we do not need to offer daily animal sacrifices because Jesus Christ was our sacrifice.

Just as we need to know to whom an invitation is addressed, we need to know to whom a passage of scripture is addressed. Then we can correctly understand what applies to us and what is for our learning. And that helps us rightly divide God's Word so that we can confidently live the truths that apply to us.

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