

The Appreciation of God [Rightly Dividing the Scriptures]

*Excerpts from an article by A. E. Knoch
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God has a goal. He intends to become All in all [to] His creatures (1 Corinthians 15:28). He will accomplish this by way of reconciling all His enemies by the blood of Christ's cross, by justifying, vivifying, and saving all mankind at the consummation (Colossians 1:20; Romans 5:18; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Timothy 2:4; 4:10).

But before this there is a long and painful preparatory process, a weary way which leads His creatures to this consummation, much of which is as dark and distressing as the goal is bright and filled with blessing.

Almost all of us are short-sighted. We see a part of the way, but we do not see the end. We confuse the going with the goal. Our translations are partly to blame, for they fail to clearly mark the fleeting nature of the process, as it is in the Original [manuscript]. And if an honest attempt is made to carry this across in a concordant version, it clashes with our conventions and our hard hearts. God grant that we may faithfully witness, in our renderings, when God reveals a *fact*, and when it is only a temporary *process*, for this He has clearly indicated in the Original.

Judgment is God's strange work. He uses it on the way. Men make it the end. No matter how an unbeliever is dealt with, whether he dies as a result of sin, or by the direct intervention of God, whether he be cast into outer darkness or into Gehenna, *this is not his end*. All who do not belong to Christ will be roused from the dead and judged before the great white throne. There they are not forgiven, or saved, but judged. *But this is not their end*. All these will be cast into the lake of fire, to suffer the second death. *Even this is not their end*. God does not reach His goal in any of His disciplinary measures. These only prepare His creatures for it. Let us not confuse the going with the goal.

Very little is said to us about God's goal until Paul completes the orbit of God's Word with his later revelations. Hints there have always been by which hearts in tune with God have been filled with high hopes. But it is not until the meridian sun of God's grace has come from behind the clouds of sin and law to reveal the deepest recesses of God's immanent love to the most undeserving of the race; it is not until the truth for the present was made known that God tore aside the veil of the future completely and gave us a clear and unclouded view of His ultimate. Once we revel in this we will never go back to previous revelation on this theme, for like the curtain of the tabernacle, it seems to hide, rather than reveal the full blaze of the Shekinah glory.

The usual way is to view the goal in the darkness of the way. We go back to passages which deal with judgments and allow them to throw their dark shadows across the consummation. We should *believe* that *God will justify all* mankind (Romans 5:18,19) and view the previous judgments in the light of this final achievement.

We bring up passages which tell of death, to darken God's declaration that it will be abolished. We should *believe* that God will make death inoperative at the *last* and view the previous passages in this glorious light. We turn to texts which prove that unbelievers will be lost or destroyed, and, with these passages, dim the great declaration that God wills the salvation of all. We should illumine them with the later and higher revelation. We find God's enemies in the fiery lake at what seems to be the close of revelation and misuse this fact to deny God's declaration that all will be reconciled (Colossians 1:20). We should not take one to destroy the other, but believe *both*, for reconciliation *follows* estrangement, and it alone accords with God's final goal.

How perverse and blind have we often been! When God says *all*, we have said *some*. When God speaks of a very small fraction of mankind, such as the living nations who stand before Christ to be judged according to their treatment of Israel – a mere handful as compared with all mankind – then we extend their sentence to *all*! Faith has almost fled from the earth. What calls itself faith is mostly a masquerade, for it refuses God's Word for the traditions of men yet insists that it is genuine.

Let us allow the light of the latest revelation to illumine the earlier, partial unfolding, and let us not use the earlier to eclipse the latest, the highest, and the only complete unveiling of God's mind and heart.

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