

# **Arlington Church of Christ**

## **Wednesday Night Class**

**Rightly Dividing and Handling the  
Word of God**

**There is much confusion in the religious world today because of a lack of serious study of God's Word. Most will simply accept the word of some preacher or 'scholar' about what the scriptures say without ever checking for themselves. Others are sincere in their belief, but base it on what a certain denomination teaches or on their own personal feelings about a subject. Most people recognize that the Bible is divided into two Testaments – the Old and the New, but they are unsure of what applies to whom and as a result they get confused because something is 'in the Bible' so they assume it applies to them. The result is a religious world that picks and chooses what they feel should be incorporated into their 'faith' without ever examining the Word of God for the truth of the matter.**

**When one insists on following what the scriptures teach as closely as possible without adding to or taking from them – they are called ‘narrow-minded’ or ‘intolerant’. But we are instructed in God’s word to be careful in following what is taught. This puts the burden of studying the Bible and comparing our beliefs and teachings on the shoulders of each individual Christian - and especially on those who claim to teach the truth to others.**

**So what does the Bible have to say about the differences between the Old and New Testaments - see ‘Following the Scriptural Trail’ lesson number 3 on the website [arlingtoncoc.com](http://arlingtoncoc.com).**

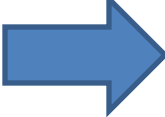
**But in this lesson we are examining the New Testament – the guide for Christians today and the teachings found there**

# For example: The Hebrew writer states in:

## Hebrews 5 :11-14

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. <sup>12</sup> In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not meat! <sup>13</sup> Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup> But meat is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

## So the question is:

 What is the difference between what the Bible calls the 'milk' and the 'meat' of the word? And how are we to deal with those brothers and sisters in Christ who have different interpretations of what are called 'disputable matters' ?

Which requires that we define what 'milk' and 'meat' are in the scriptures and what a 'disputable matter' is.

Follow the scriptural trail as we seek to answer these concerns:

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What is called **'milk'** in these verses? (**elementary truths**)

What is called **'meat'** in these verses? (**Understanding righteousness**)

# So what are the 'elementary truths' of the gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

For what I received I passed on to you as of **first importance**: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that **he was buried**, that he was **raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that **he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve**. <sup>6</sup> After that, **he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time**, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then **he appeared to James, then to all the apostles**, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one **abnormally born**

**“Milk” is the basic facts of the gospel ....**



## Hebrews 6:1-2

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, (repentance of sins) and of faith in God, <sup>2</sup> instruction about baptisms (water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism), the laying on of hands (giving of spiritual gifts by the apostle's hands), the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Note : these are basic, elementary things that all Christians ought to already know !

**‘Meat’ – was learning about ‘righteousness’  
and how to live in a way the pleases God.**

**Romans 1:17**

**For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”**

**Righteousness comes by living by faith in the gospel**

## 'Meat'

### Romans 6:13

**Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.**

**Righteousness involves how you use your body-  
(what you do)**

# 'Meat'

## 1 Corinthians 1:30

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Righteousness is not our own but comes from God through Jesus

## 'Meat'

1 Corinthians 1:30

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

**Ephesians 4:24**

**and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

**Righteousness comes when we put on Christ – allow him to control how we live in all things.**

## 2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Following all the scriptures that God has given us will equip us to know how to live in righteousness.

# What are 'disputable matters' ?

Romans 14:1-3

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over **disputable matters**. <sup>2</sup> One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

**Example – eating meat or just vegetables?**

<sup>5</sup> One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.

## **2 Peter 3:15-16**

**Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. <sup>16</sup> He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.**

**People often distort scriptures they do not understand either to justify what they personally think or because they do not understand.**



**These ‘hard to understand’ scriptures usually contain commands that we as Christians are told to follow. The difficulty comes in how people say we are to follow the command - and it is caused by either a misunderstanding of the scripture (by adding things to it that it does not say) or by one’s own personal feelings that do not line up with what the scriptures actually say. (It doesn’t say I can’t, so I think it would be ok with the Lord) This leads to what are called ‘disputable matters’ between Christians.**

**Deuteronomy 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.**

**Revelation 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.**

**For example: in the Bible there are commands that may be classified as either 'general commands' or "specific commands". A general command is one that tells us what is to be done, but leaves the method up to us, while a specific command also tells us what is to be used to carry out the command. And even in a specific command we have to use common sense - and, in fact, when we really think about it, no command or example is so spelled out in every detail that we do not have to make some inferences in actually accomplishing the command or following the example. Now some have insisted that the New Testament is clear in such passages as 1 Cor. 4:6 and 2 John 9 that we should not go beyond what has been given to us; in other words: *We should never do anything in organized religion (i.e., in the church) without scriptural authority. (Absolutely true!)***

**But some have misapplied this idea and in doing so are trying to impose their own will and ideas on the perfect command of God by adding limitations the Lord has not given.**

**Consider the instructions given Noah on building the ark. They are very specific –Gen 6:14-16 - even down to the type of wood to be used. However to carry out the command – Noah had to use tools. God did not specify the tools but left it up to Noah to use the best available tools to accomplish the specific task given him. (An inferred general command)**

### **Genesis 6:14-16**

**So make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. <sup>15</sup> This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. <sup>16</sup> Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks.**



**Or consider the command to sing during worship services –**

**Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,**

**The Lord tells us the instrument to use to make the music – the heart - which eliminates all other mechanical instruments. But some have questioned the use of songbooks saying that they are not mentioned in the New Testament, so we should not use them. True, we do not have specific authority for songbooks, but *does that mean we have no authority?* Where do we derive the authority to use them. We have the authority to sing. Further, we are commanded to “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).**

**But we do not have any specification as to how the words and parts for the singing is to be communicated to the congregation. Let us consider some alternatives; we could:**

- Commit all songs to memory**
- Have some common way that the worshipers can view the words and/or the music –charts, overhead projection, Power Point, etc.**
- Provide individuals with the words and music – this could be done by giving them individual handouts or providing a songbook, or both.**



**Song books are authorized as one expedient to the general command to sing. This very same thought process should be applied to all of the judgments that we are forced to make when carrying out God's commands. To say that there is no authority for these necessary things is erroneous -- they are authorized by the generic command or example.**

**There is also the question of which particular song, which verses to sing, how to pitch it, how fast to sing it, and on and on and on. All of those are 'authorized' by the command "to sing."**

**Or consider the command to care for widows and orphans found in James 1:27.**

**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.**

**This is a general command as we are not told how to care for them, but simply to do so. The method of doing so in a group setting, like an orphans home or a Christian senior community, or of doing so as an individual family is not specified. But some have insisted that it must be done by individuals – something the scriptures do not specify- and have insisted on it to the point of disfellowshipping those who do not agree with ‘their opinion.’**

**Or consider the question of whether we are to 'eat in the building'. It is clear from the scriptures that the early church met together for meals – Acts 2:46.**

**Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,**

**They met in homes as there was no central meeting place (like a church building) in which they could all come together.**

**Now we are told that a problem arose in the Corinthian congregation when the worship service – (the Lord's supper) was mixed with a fellowship meal – 1Cor 11:17-22.**



## 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. <sup>20</sup> So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

**Some consider the meeting place (the church building itself) as a sacred place even though we are told that the ‘church’ is not a building, but rather the people –**

**Eph 2:22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

**1Pet 2:5 – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

**and take the scripture in 1Cor 11 to mean that we are not to eat together in a place where communion was taken. While this is a misapplication of the scripture, it is the way they feel.**

There are many other things not specifically spelled out in scripture that could fall into differences of opinion. So what is a Christian to do when confronted with brothers and sisters who disagree?

**Paul faced a situation in his time concerning the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. It was a common practice in pagan cities to offer animals as sacrifices to an idol. The excess meat from the animal was then taken and sold to the public at the local meat market. Some Christians (mainly Jewish Christians) would not eat the meat as they considered it as 'contaminated' by having been part of idol worship, while others (mainly Gentile Christians) considered it simply as a piece of meat. Paul addressed the subject in**

**1Cor 8:4-13 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.....**

**7 But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. 8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.**

**9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.**

**13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.**

## 1 Corinthians 10:23-29

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. <sup>24</sup> No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

**<sup>25</sup> Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,** <sup>26</sup> for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

**<sup>27</sup> If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.** <sup>28</sup> But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. <sup>29</sup> I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience?

Romans 14:22-23

**So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. <sup>23</sup> But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.**

**When we are around someone who holds a different opinion on how a general command is to be carried out – we are to keep our opinion to ourselves, be fully convinced in our own mind by reading the scriptures, and not insist that they immediately change their opinion to ours. We are not to insist that they violate their conscience, but rather gently teach the truth from God’s Word and let the power of the scriptures have its effect.**