

## KNOWLEDGE

The Apostle Paul lamented the fact that most of his fellow Jews were lost because their beliefs and practices were *"not according to knowledge"* ( Rom. 10:2). In another place he spoke of those who *"received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth"* (2 Th. 2:10-12).

Why is knowledge of the truth seemingly such a difficult thing for people to find? As Paul just pointed out, some people do not love the truth therefore they will never seek it. They love self more and will at best follow a perverted version of the Gospel that suits their own desires. Beyond this, however, there is another reason why most people who study the scriptures can be classified as *"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Ti. 3:7).

Knowledge of the scriptures does not come simply as a result of studying. I am not saying that studying will not increase our knowledge, but that there are levels of knowledge and this affects what we are able to understand. Many times I have heard very sincere Christians remark that they recently read a passage of scripture that they have doubtless read dozens of times in the past, yet this time they saw something there they had missed all of those other times. Why does this happen? It all comes down to how we learn from the scriptures.

Can you imagine trying to teach a first grader advanced mathematics? There is no possible way that they can understand algebra and trigonometry when they are still trying to figure out why  $1 + 1 = 2$ . The basics of addition must come first, then subtraction, then multiplication and division. Not until students have a firm foundation in these basic mathematical operations could we hope to teach them more difficult and abstract concepts.

Knowledge of God's word must be acquired in a similar way; we must learn the basics first and then progress into deeper and deeper things. This is why the writer of Hebrews said, *"for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong*

meat" (Heb. 5:12). Without the proper foundation, it is simply not possible to understand the deeper mysteries of the Bible.

The Apostle Peter spoke of the steps of Christian growth in II Peter chapter 1. *"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity"* (2 Pe. 2:5-7). Many lessons have been preached on how a Christian must progress through these in a step-by-step manner. What is usually missed in all of this is the role knowledge plays in it.

Peter mentioned knowledge four times between verses 2 and 8. In his greeting Peter said, *"grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,"* (v.2). He further said the Lord *"hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue"* (v.3). In verses 5-6 he lists knowledge as the third of seven steps. Finally in verse 8, Peter tells us that *"if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

As I considered this passage (certainly not for the first time; I have used it in numerous lessons over the years) a few months ago, something struck me as strange. Why was knowledge mentioned before and after the seven steps and as one of the steps? Looking a little further, I noticed that Peter actually used two different Greek words that have been translated into English as the same word: knowledge.

The first of the seven steps is faith. Paul said that *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17). Clearly a basic knowledge of God and His plan for salvation is necessary for that initial faith. Why is knowledge then mentioned as a separate step later in the list? This shows that He expects us to progress beyond that basic knowledge and learn more of Him from His word.

The word translated as knowledge, which is the third step in the list, is from the Greek word "gnosis." Thayer defines this word as "moral wisdom, such as is seen in right living." This fits beautifully with the second step, virtue (from the Greek *arête*) which Thayer defines as "a virtuous course of thought, feeling, and action; virtue, moral goodness." But shouldn't this "moral wisdom" come before virtuous action? It might seem so at first,

but experience teaches us that this is sadly often not the case. We can warn our children against the dangers that we know exist in the world, but so often they make the same mistakes we made before truly learning their lesson. Experience is often the best teacher. It sometimes takes pain, physical or emotional, to make them truly understand. The same is true with us spiritually. This is why the Hebrew writer said, *"but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Heb. 5:14). Full age (wisdom and experience) come through trial and error; we make mistakes and learn from them. Only then do we really understand what God meant and why.

But what of the other uses of the word knowledge? All three come from the Greek word "epignosis," which Thayer defines as "the knowledge of [God's] holy will and of the blessings which he has bestowed and constantly bestows on men through Christ."

Consider the parallels between the growth of a child and the growth of a Christian. A newborn infant only needs to know how to suck and cry; others will take care of everything else. A newborn babe in Christ is not required to know or do anything beyond the plan of salvation and the necessity of assembling with the Church. As a newborn matures he must learn to crawl, walk, talk, feed himself, dress himself, etc. Notice that everything he learns and does is for his own growth. Likewise, as a new Christian matures he must progress through the stage of learning to be virtuous (moral goodness) and to gain knowledge (moral wisdom). Just like the young child, this stage of development is all about him and his progress and he needs help and guidance along the way.

Finally, that child grows into a young man or woman who is capable, not only of taking care of their own needs, but also of helping others. They have passed through the self-centered stage of childhood and are able to see and respond to the needs of others. As the Christian matures, he also reaches a similar stage. He can begin to see beyond the simple need of managing his own behavior (something we must always continue to do) and begin to look to the needs of others.

With this understanding, we can now see Peter's comments in a better light. We can have grace and peace multiplied to us through this higher knowledge (v.2). This knowledge provides us with everything we need for life and godliness (v.3). And if it is in us, it ensures that we will not be barren nor unfruitful (v.8).

This "higher knowledge" I refer to is the same as the strong meat mentioned in Hebrews 5:14. It also does not come simply through studying. The world, and its seemingly unlimited supply of false doctrines, demonstrates that simply reading the Bible does not lead to correct knowledge. Spiritual maturity is required for us to grasp the deeper concepts God has presented in His Word. This is why we are constantly finding new truths in old passages. We were not mature enough to understand the first 50 times we read it, but it finally clicked.

The seven steps Peter lists are not like the usual set of steps we walk up where we leave one behind as we move to the next. Our foundation, faith, must continue to grow as we mature. You cannot build a large building on a small foundation. As faith grows so does virtue, then knowledge, then temperance, etc. And as we mature and grow in all of these areas we become capable of understanding more and more. It is as the Lord said, *"because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given"* (Mat. 13:11).

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## APOLOGIA

QUESTION: How many assemblies may a congregation observe?

ANSWER: The Bible does designate a certain day on which early disciples customarily assembled to observe the communion. This is recorded in Acts 20:7 where Luke wrote, *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..."* This is further confirmed by Paul who recognized this day and assembly as the occasion for the disciples to also attend to a contribution. Then the penman of Hebrews (10:26) wrote, *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* These Biblical examples are the reason why the Lord's church in our day continues to assemble and observe the communion on the first day of every week.

An assembly of the church may be held at any place where the brethren deem appropriate. The assembly in Acts 20:7-9 was held in an "upper chamber" of a building (perhaps the third floor). There was a church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19), as well as in the house of Nymphas (Col. 4:15). The place holds no significance.

An assembly of the church is a gathering called for and arranged by the church, as opposed to an individual inviting members to his own home and engaging in private Bible studies. At such private occasions those invited may even drink coffee or enjoy refreshments while they are discussing the Bible; something prohibited in a church assembly. The principles which relate to an assembly are found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 10:16 through chapter 16:1-2:

- Common meals are prohibited (1 Cor. 11:20-22)
- Those who speak foreign languages must be interpreted or remain silent (1 Cor. 14:27-28)
- Men only are to be the speakers (1 Cor. 14:6)
- Those who speak are to do so "one by one" so that all present may learn from each speaker (1 Cor. 14:31). This prohibits dividing the assembly into classes.
- Women are to remain silent (1 Cor. 14:34-35)

In these chapters, the assembly is either mentioned or alluded to at least fourteen times (11:17, 18, 20, 33, 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 26, 28, 34, 35, and 16:2).

However, there is no Biblical passage or principle which regulates the number of assemblies to be called by a congregation. Provided an assembly conforms to these principles, and except when the communion is observed on the first day of each week, we may meet any number of times in a day or on any day where the need suggests it. The assembly at Jerusalem in Acts 15:6-30 was not an assembly called for the purpose of observing the communion, yet the regulations for an assembly applied:

- Men only were speakers (four named, others not named)
- Speakers spoke "one by one"
- Women remained silent.

Then select brethren left this assembly, traveled to Antioch, and "*gathered the multitude together*" at which time the epistle from the assembly at Jerusalem was read (Acts 15:30-31). There is no indication, but rather to the contrary, that this was the usual Lord's supper assembly.

James 2:2 refers to an assembly but does not restrict his instructions to the assembly on the first day of the week.

In 1 Corinthians 5:4 Paul suggests the brethren be "*gathered together*" to consider a case of adultery, but he did not restrict this gathering to the Lord's supper assembly on the first day of the week.

Except for observance of the communion, for the church to assemble on any day or as many times on that day as they deem appropriate conforms to Biblical principles. To restrict this liberty would be to limit grand opportunities granted by our Savior.

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## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. During the ordination of Aaron and his sons, how long were they to remain at the entrance to the tabernacle of meeting according to Moses' commandment?
2. In Judges who came to Bokim and told the people that they would suffer for turning away from the Lord?
3. Who was David fleeing from when he wrote in Psalm 3: "*Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!*"?
4. What tree did Jesus curse for having no fruit for him to eat?
5. Who founded the Church at Colossi?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. According to Deuteronomy Moses said that because God was angry with the people, God would not allow Moses to do what? CROSS THE JORDAN AND SEE THE LAND (Deut. 3:25-29)
2. What did Job say that once his testing was over he would come forth as? GOLD (Job 23:10)

3. In Lamentations Jeremiah said that people who remained in Jerusalem were doing what? TRADING THEIR VALUABLES FOR FOOD IN ORDER TO SURVIVE (Lam. 1:11)
4. In Luke's account when the prodigal son wasted all his inheritance, what did he end up doing? FEEDING SWINE (15:15)
5. What gift did Paul state that the Corinthians should especially desire? GIFT OF PROPHECY (1 Cor. 14:1)