

The Old Paths

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“That Ye May Know...”

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Paul wrote to the Ephesian brethren for the purpose of furthering their spiritual knowledge. In this book, he makes many references to the knowledge they could have about Christ and His will. Paul tells these brethren that he did not stop praying for them in order that *“the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places”* (Eph. 1:17-20).

Paul makes it clear that the purpose in his prayer was that the Ephesians might know: 1) the hope of his calling, 2) the riches of the glory of his inheritance, 3) the greatness of God’s power toward Christians, and 4) how all these things connected with Christ. What an amazing thing it is to read of Paul’s intentions toward these Christians. He was not like many who wish to keep people in ignorance, but wanted them to know and be aware of the truth!

Being ignorant (especially in the Scriptures) helps no one. In fact, ignorance produces great harm. Therefore, Paul wished for

these brethren to be knowledgeable in the will of Christ. We know this because he emphasized the need for the Ephesians to have spiritual knowledge on four occasions:

1) He mentions again a prayer he had for the Ephesians in which he prays that they may *“know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”* (3:19).

2) He shows them that they need to know that God is equitable and fair with men, whether they are slave or free (6:9-10).

3) He discusses the “mystery” concerning the Gentiles being fellow-heirs with the Jews and says this was something that was *“made known”* to Paul, so he made it known to others through his teaching (3:3, 5-6, 6:19).

4) Paul told the Ephesians, *“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is”* (5:17).

We cannot read the book of Ephesians without being impressed with the continued emphasis on spiritual knowledge. Yet, an epidemic we face today is a lack of knowledge concerning God’s will. We live in a time in which a focused study of God’s word is rare, indeed. Most people have little concern for the Bible, and those who have some kind of religious mindset or background, prefer to read books about the Bible, rather than simply reading the Bible! How sad.

Once, our brethren were known as “walking Bibles.” Today, it seems like many are satisfied to be like “everyone else.” What has happened? I may not know all the reasons, but I

know one reason is that spiritual laziness has swept over many of us, and we have become apathetic toward Bible reading and study.

Look again to some of the references we have mentioned in Ephesians. How can we know about the *“hope of his calling”* and *“the riches of the glory of his inheritance”* without a knowledge of God’s will (Eph. 1:18)? How can we know that all are subject to the gospel without first taking the time to study this subject? Do we know the theme of the Bible? Have we accepted the denominational mindset which says that the Bible is too hard for people to understand, therefore we cannot be united on any one doctrine? Or, do we have the spiritual mindset which says we can understand and be united like God said (Eph. 5:17; I Cor. 1:10)? Brethren, we’ll not be what we need to be until we set aside time daily for Bible reading and study, and then apply what we learn to our everyday lives!

Peter said, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (I Pet. 4:11). How can one speak as he needs to speak unless he knows what to speak? This lack of Bible knowledge is not only seen in the pew, but also in the pulpit. How sad it is that a preacher cannot get up and just preach the gospel to people! Anymore, it seems, he must “entertain,” tell jokes, invoke tears through sad stories, and make sure he gets done within the “allotted time.” We don’t want to be late to the restaurant! We don’t want to miss the kick-off of the football game! We don’t want to waste too much time in worship to God. (We need to get things done at home, this afternoon!) The attitude evident with many is akin to the attitude the Jews had when they came to worship God and said, *“Behold, what a weariness is it!”* (Mal. 1:13). Yes, what makes this worse is that there are preachers ready to appease such an attitude in order to keep their paycheck.

This means such spiritually ignorant people as we mentioned above will never get better. They will stay as carnal babies under such circumstances (I Cor. 3:1-3).

Are we ready to grow out of this? Are we ready to be what God wants us to be? Are we ready to know the will of God, and be spiritually minded, which means life and peace (Rom. 8:6)? If so, then let us observe a few things:

1) We must have the will to do what God wants. This is true in any aspect of life. Until such a time as we make a conscious choice, (we want to lose weight; we want to exercise more; we want to be a better person; etc.) it will never happen. This is also true spiritually. Without a determined resolve to live as God wants us to, we will never do it. This is why Christ encourages us to "count the cost" (Lk. 14:26-33). This is why becoming a Christian is not something babies do, but is for adults, men and women ready to make that decision to do what Christ wants! Christ said, "*If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself*" (Jn. 7:17, ASV).

2) We must do whatever the Lord expects of us. After making the decision to serve Christ, we must be prepared to obey and stick with it. Don't we sing the song "*If Jesus Goes With Me I'll Go, Anywhere*"? Do we really mean this, or is this just words we sing? Paul taught, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*" (Col. 3:17). Jesus said it is the strait and narrow way which leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). Are we willing to walk that path, or are we going to follow the broad way? Christ is "*the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*" (Heb. 5:9). Are we obedient or not?

Remember, we cannot obey what we do not know!

3) We must be ready for the reactions of others. Peter said that after the conversion of some of the Gentiles, their friends thought "*it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*" (I Pet. 4:4). Some of the Thessalonians suffered for the cause of Christ, and yet they still remained strong (I Thess. 2:13-16). On the other hand, we find some who, having seen what Christ did to their friends, became Christians themselves. In the first century, an entire city was converted to Christ, including a known sorcerer who had been guilty of bewitching that city (Acts 8:6-13).

4) We must be ready to teach others the truth. Once we are prepared for both the positive and negative reactions of others, let us calmly, and rationally show them the truth. If we know what we did to be saved, we can tell others what to do to be saved (II Tim. 2:2)! We see several occasions in the book of Acts where people took it upon themselves to show others the truth. One example is seen in Aquila and Priscilla teaching Apollos the truth (Acts 18:24-26). We also see Philip spreading the gospel at Samaria, in the unpopulated region between Jerusalem and Gaza, then at Azotus (Ashdod), and on to Caesarea (Acts 8). There are countless other examples of Christians willing to spread the gospel to all who would

listen. Will we follow their example?

Conclusion

Ezra is a fine example of what we have been trying to stress in this article. The Bible says Ezra "*was a ready scribe in the law of Moses*" and that he "*prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*" (Ezra 7:6, 10). Are we ready and willing to do what it takes to live by the gospel and to spread it? If so, then remember where this starts! It begins with knowledge. We cannot teach (nor live) what we do not know! Paul emphasized the need for those Ephesian brethren to know the truth, to know of the blessings belonging to those in Christ, to know of Christ's love, and to know the mystery of the gospel in that all men are subject to the same plan for salvation.

Do we spend time in God's book? There is no substitute, nor shortcut for the systematic reading and studying of God's word. When we read, we can know (Eph. 3:4). When we study we can be approved of God (II Tim. 2:15). Let us not only learn this ourselves, but drill this into the hearts of our young people, and let it sink down into their ears. We are in a fight for our spiritual lives, and the worst thing we can do is waste our time not knowing our enemies from our friends. Ignorance of God's word means fighting for the wrong side. Let us know God's will and follow it that we may see Heaven one day!

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