

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Step Two: To Virtue Knowledge

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. For 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. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5–9, KJV 1900)

In some ways, we live in the "Knowledge" generation. Given the modern advances in technology, you can purchase almost any book on any topic of your liking. You can even go onto the internet, buy the book, and in a few minutes this book in electronic form is on your computer or tablet for your reading. Contrast this culture to the time when men had to write every letter by hand on crudely made pages. And this is just the original copy. If they wished to distribute their writings, those copies also must be produced by hand, one tedious letter at a time. Despite the flood of knowledge at our fingertips today, we may well see more conscious, willful ignorance than in any past generation. It is shocking to observe how clueless so many people are about so many things.

We have too long lived with the faulty idea of faith that it in some essential way is the mirror opposite of knowledge. People who claim to be strong believers in God talk boldly about "Taking a leap of faith into the darkness." If they knew as much about Scripture as they claim, they'd understand that any Biblical leap of faith is out of darkness into light, and out of ignorance into knowledge. Biblical faith does not glory in darkness or ignorance, but in the light of true knowledge.

When we ponder this word knowledge and Peter's use of it in his list of cardinal godly traits for the fruitful faith and life, we face major issues of discernment. What knowledge shall you choose to gain? You can enroll in a local college and gain a degree that certifies a level of knowledge in some specialty within a few years. You can buy choice books on various topics and soon master the topic. Adam and Eve took the serpent's bait to gain knowledge by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Did that knowledge enrich their lives? Did it help them? No, it cursed them. **The crucial issue for the believer in Christ is his/her choice of the knowledge to be gained.** If we settle on an English translation of the Bible, and I comfortably live with my King James Bible, we are reading the same text at that point of information. But, in one way or another, almost every believer will also look beyond Scripture to some other source for more knowledge, or for

hopefully an increased focus on Bible knowledge. A primary Biblical source of this knowledge is preaching. It is thus not unusual for the believer to look for preaching to increase that godly knowledge. Ah, but the rub. Scripture affirms what life experience testifies; you can find some preacher out there who believes and teaches just about anything your itching ears wish to hear. When John admonished, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world," (1 John 4:1) he was referring to some of those first century false prophets. Most of John's New Testament writing directly or indirectly confronts and refutes the first century heresy of Gnosticism. We see this ancient error prominently in First John. John was not warning his readers about a mystical spirit being; he warned them against any false prophet who pretends to march under the banner of Jesus, but preached another gospel, not the truth of Jesus. Immediately following this verse, John gives his readers the measure to identify and reject the gnostic error of the day regarding Jesus' literal human body, Incarnation (God coming and living in a human body), literal, bodily resurrection, and literal—and emphatically, yes—bodily ascension back to His former glory.

How does the believer today arrive at a respectable level of spiritual discernment so that he/she may distinguish truth from error? Otherwise, we may gain knowledge of things better left in ignorance, and impede our spiritual growth rather than facilitate it.

In two related passages, Jesus gives us the answer.

*And he said unto them, Take heed **what ye hear**: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. (Mark 4:24; emphasis added)*

*Take heed therefore **how ye hear**: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. (Luke 8:18; emphasis added)*

When we hear godly truth preached, Jesus' commandment requires that we pay attention to "**How**" we hear it. Will we be forgetful hearers and imitate the man who built his house on the sand? Or will we be faithful hearers who hear and obey, building our house, our lives, on His solid rock?

When we become aware that a man is preaching error, do we continue to support him and listen to him because of the occasional truth that he teaches? I strongly suggest that Jesus requires—**commands**—us to avoid hearing such a man at all. We can only take heed "**What**" we hear by simply not hearing some people and the error that they teach. Jesus requires both of us.

When we hear a man preach truth and see him live it, Jesus' command requires us to weigh "how" we hear it? Do we hear and obey, or do we hear and not obey? According to Jesus, the difference predicts a stable house, life structure, in the heat of life's storms, or a crumbling pile of ruins. Which shall we choose? (Matthew 7:24-27)

I have observed the slow, creeping, and insidious quality of error on the naïve folks who hear it, and continue hearing it. It slowly absorbs into their minds and contaminates their conscience, as well as their faith. No believer is so strong that he is not liable eventually to fall prey to this compromise. Jesus knew us well when He gave us this dual commandment to filter our hearing.

False knowledge—knowledge and belief of error—will not function in Peter's logical inspired sequence the same as sound, true Biblical knowledge. In fact, it will function in the opposite way. Rather than setting the stage for future fruitful building, it stunts all spiritual maturing, and urges its adherents into false worship or admiration of the false teacher, eventually leading to a sad form of idolatry, preacher worship. Worse still, it fosters the worship of a false preacher, not a faithful one. And, sadly often, the preacher of falsehood carries excessive baggage of ego that gladly encourages a false and excessive tribute to him only.

Linked in some way is this trait of knowledge and the Biblical quality of wisdom. Scripture doesn't honor knowledge of error. Study the impact of false knowledge on Adam and Eve. Shall knowledge of error, especially creeping belief in it, result in a different outcome for you or me? Not at all. For many years I pondered a simple definition of Biblical wisdom. Based on Scripture's own testimony, it manifests itself in fearing God and in departing from evil, from sin. (Job 28:28) From Exodus 28 to Exodus 36, Scripture uses this word "Wisdom" eight times in its description of the qualifying trait of the various people who worked to build or make the various items to be used in God's worship in the tabernacle of witness. In some way, "Wisdom" related to their ability to do the various kinds of work that each of them performed. Perhaps these eight passages stirred my mind fruitfully more than any others. My simple working

definition of God-honoring, Biblical wisdom is "Skill in the art of living life according to God's pattern." We have all met someone who, no matter how you tried to explain or teach them, "Just didn't get it." And we have also met some folks who listened attentively and "Wisely" applied the Biblical principles and truths they learned to their life-conduct, wholly transforming their lives to glorify the Lord in the process.

Think about the nature of the inspired words of Scripture. You can read it as many times as you wish. If you approach it as God's holy writings, **given and preserved** by Him for the instruction of His children, you'll never reach the point that one more reading doesn't raise thoughts that you never considered before, ideas that enrich your life and provide invaluable aid in your building the seven-story building of faith that Peter commands in our study passage. Because of low back problems, I normally go to a local physical therapy facility three times a week for almost two hours of therapy. Shortly after beginning this process, I purchased an MP3 player (Water proof since most of my time is in water therapy) and the Alexander Scourby reading of the whole Bible. Once I get ready for my therapy routine, I "Plug in" to my Bible reading. I set the reading to go from Genesis to Revelation, and to start right back again at Genesis. Aside from my focused Bible study, this exercise exposes me to the whole Bible about four times a year. Despite having lived with my Bible for almost sixty years, every time I go through the Scourby reading, I pick up exciting new thoughts that work their way into my Bible study.

For too many believers, there is no real comprehension of difference between Bible reading and Bible study. They may read a few chapters from their Bible each day and get through the Bible once or twice a year, but this is almost the full extent of their time with their Bible. Reading your Bible is an excellent exercise and not to be neglected, but it is the first step toward adding knowledge to our virtue, not the last step. Digging into Scripture's teachings, shedding major quantities of "Spiritual sweat" from the hard work of striving to get to the Holy Spirit's meaning and instruction to me for my life requires far more than one casual reading after another. For most believers, that study should strongly emphasize the New Testament, especially the letters that follow Acts. What does the Bible say about "Lifestyles"? Is it neutral, or does it provide you with clear knowledge? What does it say about marriage, divorce, and families? What does it teach about your spiritual life, faith-walk, and about that thing called church? Are these things neutral or nice if convenient according to Scripture? Or does Scripture contain clear commandments regarding them? Beware any preacher who dismisses the New Testament as giving no more than broad general teaching. It is wholly specific and detailed. Do we listen when it speaks?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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