

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD – ITS VALUE.

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto God and life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us by his own glory and virtue."

– 2 Pet. 1:2,3 – *Reading of Sinaitic manuscript.*

THE FIRST question coming to us in connection with these words of exhortation is, To whom were they addressed? Are these the instructions given to sinners? Is this the way by which sinners are to approach to God? No. These instructions are addressed to those who are already justified through faith in the precious blood of Christ, as indicated in the preceding verse. They are addressed – "To them who have obtained like precious faith with us [the apostles] through the righteousness of our Lord and Savior,* Jesus Christ."

*Reading of Sinaitic MS.

The suggestion clearly is that to become believers in Christ Jesus – even justified and fully consecrated believers – is not sufficient; there is to be a progress in the life just begun which will continue as long as we are "in this tabernacle," and, if faithful, be completed in "the first resurrection." The thought of the Apostle is not year by year revivals with year by year backslidings, but rather a continued *progression* in the new life. This thought is quite in contradiction of the experiences of very many who assume the name of Christ, which, alas! are too often expressed in the lines of the hymn:

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"Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I found the Lord?
Where is the soul-reviving view of Jesus and his Word?"

The prevalent idea amongst this class of Christians might be termed alternate subtractions and additions of grace and peace. They first get a blessing, then lose it, then find it again to lose it again, and

thus continue. There is a logical reason why this course is so prevalent, and why so few know anything about the multiplication which the Apostle here mentions – "Grace and peace be *multiplied* unto you." The reason is that the majority of Christians lack a knowledge of those things which are necessary to preserve to them the grace and peace found through their primary faith in the Lord as their Redeemer; and much more do they lack a sufficiency of knowledge to *multiply* their grace and peace. The vast majority occupy the position mentioned by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 3:1) "I, brethren, could not write unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal – even as unto babes in Christ;" "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." – Heb. 5:12-14. [R2137 : page 114]

An error on one subject often leads to many errors on many subjects; and so it is in this case: the doctrine of eternal torment as the penalty for the fall, from which only believers will escape, has distorted the judgment and misdirected the efforts of many of the Lord's people. With some of the most earnest the first thought is personal escape from eternal torment, and naturally the second thought is to help as many others as possible to escape such an awful eternity. With this thought as the mainspring of conduct, we cannot wonder that by such chief attention is paid to "saving sinners" and bringing them into the condition of "babes in Christ." But after they become babes comparatively little is done to develop them in the knowledge of God, that they may grow up into the full stature of manhood in Christ. As babes they are continually fed upon the milk, and hence are unused to the strong meat, so that when they do attempt its use, they are more likely to be choked by it than to be strengthened.

The Apostle points out the proper course by which the believer, having made a proper start, shall continue onward and upward in his Christian development – multiplying his grace and his peace. It is all-important, however, that he begin right, that he be truly begotten "by the word of truth," "the faith once delivered unto the saints" – which

the Apostle here terms "*precious* faith." This is not the faith promulgated by the higher critics. Their faith is far from precious. Their faith denies the fall, denies the ransom and all necessity for it, and consequently denies the resurrection based upon that ransom. Their faith consists in believing in their own judgments as the criteria of what is truth and what is error, and in doubting the testimony of Moses and the prophets, of the Lord and the apostles. Such a faith is not the "*precious* faith," is not "the faith once delivered unto the saints." And those who are building upon such a faith are not of those here addressed by the Apostle, and we need not expect that either their grace or their peace will be multiplied. We trust, however, that the majority of our readers are of those who can sing with the spirit and the understanding also, – "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand."

The true foundation, upon which we should build, is, – faith in the righteousness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, – faith that his sacrifice for sin was once for all a full and complete ransom-price for Adam and all his posterity, so that all of these, as in due time they shall be brought to a knowledge of Christ, may, **[R2137 : page 115]** if they will, obtain cleansing and eternal life under the gracious terms of the New Covenant. It is those who build upon this foundation that may hope to multiply their grace and peace. How?

The Apostle answers – "Through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." At first it may occur to some that this has but a slight meaning, and that it simply signifies that we come to know that there is a God, and that there is a Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But the knowledge of God means far more than this to the advancing and developing Christian: to him it means an intimate acquaintance with the Father and with the Son, a knowledge of the "mind of Christ," which is a full and clear representation to us of the mind of the Father. We are to grow in this knowledge by studying the Word of God, by

discerning through that Word the principles which govern the divine conduct, as to how divine justice, wisdom, love and power operate. These are progressive studies. Something may be learned the first day of our Christian experience, but the end of the first year should show considerable progress in the knowledge of the divine mind; the second year should show us a still further increase, and so on.

As our *intimate* knowledge of the divine plan and character increases, so must also our grace increase; for those who do not attempt to come into harmony, step by step, with that which they see of the divine character will soon lose interest in such knowledge, while those who have the interest which leads to further and further study must of necessity be growing in grace continually. And as they grow in grace, so also will they grow in peace; for peace also is a progressive thing. We had peace when first we found the Lord and realized the forgiveness of our sins; but those who have made progress in the knowledge of the divine plan and character have found their peace to be an ever-increasing one; and those who have advanced some distance in the good way can speak of it in the language of the apostles and realize it in their hearts as being "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

The Apostle, continuing, assures us that through this knowledge of God is imparted to us as by divine power "*all things that pertain unto life and godliness.*" What an assurance! This statement of the importance of knowledge for our Christian development in every direction reminds us of the words of our Lord, "This is life eternal; that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) To *know God*, as the Apostle here explains, signifies an *intimate acquaintance* with "him that hath called us by his own glory and virtue." It is only as we realize something of the greatness and perfection of the divine character that we are properly able to estimate our own littleness and imperfection; only as we see the beauties of his gracious character can we become intimately acquainted with God, familiar with his graces and virtues. The

influence of this knowledge and fellowship with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, reacts upon our own hearts, and has a cleansing and sanctifying effect. Thus the Apostle prays for some that they might grow in the knowledge of God so as to be able to "comprehend with all saints what is the length and the breadth, the depth and the height of the love of Christ which passeth [human] understanding." (Eph. 3:14-19.) Those beholding the divine character, even though but dimly, as through a glass, are thereby changed from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord. – 2 Cor. 3:18.

The thought here brought to our attention is well illustrated in the modern art of photography. In photography there is necessary first of all a sensitized plate upon which the picture is to be reflected. Not any or every plate will serve such a purpose, but only one which has been specially prepared. This corresponds to the preparation of our hearts through repentance and justifying faith toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This first step is necessary before we can receive upon our hearts the impress of the divine character, its glory and virtue or strength. The second step is to bring the sensitized plate into good range with the features which are to be impictured upon it. This represents the proper attitude of heart; *viz.*, full consecration to the Lord, and a desire to have his will to be our will and to have his character represented in our lives. The third step is the removal of all obscurity, all darkness, allowing the light to shine fully in upon the features to be copied. This finds its counterpart in the knowledge of God, which, as the light of truth scatters the darkness of error and sin and gives us clearer views of the divine character, and thus permits it to impress our prepared hearts and to stamp thereon his glorious character-likeness. Fourth, the sensitized plate must then be subjected to acids in order to the clearer development of the likeness. This also finds its correspondence; for our hearts, after we have gotten a clear view of the Lord, and been freely impressed with the glories of his character, require nevertheless the "fiery trials" of life, which, like the acid, only tend to develop the likeness the more perfectly. Fifth (for the correspondence continues), it is a well known fact that although

photographs may be taken without the use of the precious metals, gold and silver, yet only when these are used will the photograph retain its color without fading. As heretofore seen, gold represents the divine nature, and silver represents the truth; and only in proportion as the likeness of our Lord is *fixed* in our hearts upon the basis [R2137 : page 116] of the truth and the divine nature can a lasting likeness be hoped for. – Rom. 8:29.

The world in general, of course, "knows not God," and very evidently the great mass of professing believers know very little about him. The Apostle Paul explains, that Satan, "the god of this world," is particularly interested in hindering any from obtaining the light upon the Lord's character and plan necessary to impicture it upon their hearts. He declares, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the glorious light of the gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4.) Here we see the constant and irrepressible conflict – the battle of darkness against the light, as our Lord explained it in his day, saying, "The darkness hateth the light, neither cometh to the light." But all who receive and rejoice in and obey the light are the "children of the light;" and after the image of the Lord has been impressed upon their hearts, such become light-bearers to others and so shine forth upon all with whom they come in contact, reflecting the light which is shining upon them from the divine source unseen and unappreciated by the world.

At present the influence of these lights is but small in comparison with what it will be hereafter. Now, the Lord's people are like lights set upon a hill which cannot be hid, and yet their influence upon the world is comparatively small. It is still true of the [R2138 : page 116] body of Christ as it was true of the Head, "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." But of the by and by it is written, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father;" "The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams." This will be the great Millennial day; and as a result of the shining forth of the elect Church, we are assured that all

darkness will disappear and the light of "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth."

Proceeding, the Apostle assures us that, in order to the attainment of this intimate knowledge of God which multiplies our grace and peace and gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness, God has "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." Looking about us, we find that the majority of our fellow-Christians in the world, even of those who have the "precious faith" and trust in the "precious blood," must be "babes" in even elementary knowledge; for evidently they do not know much concerning these exceeding great and precious promises. If we would inquire of them with reference to these promises, the vast majority would answer, – Our hope is that by the grace of God, if faithful, we shall escape eternal torment and get to heaven. And many would add, If I can get just inside the door of heaven, it will be all I could ask or hope for.

What? Do they know *nothing* of the "exceeding great and precious promises" mentioned by the Apostle? Alas! apparently very little. But what are these promises, and who have knowledge of them?

Only those who are following in the pathway which the Apostle here marks out; who multiply their grace and peace, through an ever-increasing, intimate knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, – those who are seeing more and more clearly the divine character and plan, and whose hearts are in a susceptible and impressionable attitude, and upon which is being *fixed* more and more distinctly the image of God's dear Son, who is the express image of the Father. (Rom. 8:29.) Before these, shining out as helps by the way, in letters of light, are the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God's Word, which to other hearts are unilluminated, dark and almost meaningless.

Which and what are these promises?

Oh, they are so many and so precious that it is difficult to know which would rank first. Perhaps first of all is the precious promise, "It

doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be *like him*, for we shall *see him as he is.*" Another is, "If I go away, I will come again, and receive you unto myself;" in harmony with which is the prayer, "Father, I will that these may be *with me*, where I am, that they may behold my glory." Another is, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Another is, "They shall be mine...in that day when I make up my jewels." Another is, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Another is, that we are "Heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Another is, that we are "*Begotten again* to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." Another is, "To him that overcometh I will give power over the nations" – authority, dominion as "kings and priests unto God" to "reign on the earth." Another is that these kings and priests will reign to bless, as it is written, "In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Another promise is that Israel according to the flesh shall yet obtain mercy and blessing through the mercy of these kings and priests of the Gospel age. – Rom. 11:32.

Finally, all of these exceeding great and precious promises are summed up by the Apostle in his declaration that, through this knowledge of God and **[R2138 : page 117]** through the influence of these precious promises, it is God's will that we who by nature were children of wrath even as others "might become *partakers of the divine nature.*" Oh, what a rich promise is here! How exceedingly great and precious! Who could have thought such a thing? Our highest thought might possibly have been perfection of the human nature, the earthly image of God, or perhaps, as some have sung, we might want to be angels and with the angels stand. But although angelic nature is higher than human nature, our God has not been content with offering

to the "elect" Church angelic nature, but in the riches of his grace and wonderful provision he has far outdone the highest flight of human fancy and has promised that the overcoming Church, the "little flock," to whom it is his good pleasure to give the Kingdom, the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall be exalted to share the *divine glory and divine nature of her Lord*, as well as to share his heavenly Kingdom.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for us: we cannot comprehend why our great Creator should exalt to his own nature such poor, helpless creatures of the dust as we by nature are. But this and all the other gracious promises exhibit to us more and more the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths, of the love of our God, which surpasses human knowledge.

In view of what we already know of our Creator, especially as revealed to us in and through our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus, shall we not, as those who have come to see something of his glorious character, "press toward the mark" (Phil. 3:14) for the attainment of all that he may be pleased to reveal to us concerning himself, that thus we may be more and more partakers of his spirit, more and more conformed to his likeness, more and more acceptable, and by and by be actually and everlastingly accepted in the Beloved, to the full realization of all those blessings which God has in reservation for them who love him, and of which now we have the exceeding great and precious promises?

Such promises and such knowledge properly inspire our hearts to love, obedience and self-sacrifice, that we may please him who has called us to his own nature and fellowship; and, as the Apostle says, "He who hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [the Lord] is pure."

It was to this intimate knowledge of or acquaintance with the Lord and its reward that the Apostle Paul referred, saying, – "That I might *know him* and [experience] the power of *his resurrection* [the First or Chief Resurrection, by] being made [fully] conformable unto

his death [– which full surrender is possible to those only who *know him* well and have drunk in his spirit]." – Phil. 3:10.
