

The Sword AND Staff

“Preach the Word” (II Timothy 4:2) • “Feed the Flock” (I Peter 5:2)

A Treasure Trove of Truth

● *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28, KJV).*



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THIS VERSE of Scripture is simply loaded with valuable information that is helpful in understanding truth on many different Bible subjects. That being the case, let us give a simple running commentary on what is said and implied here, making brief and practical applications while bringing in other Scripture. There are many good lessons to be noticed. The material is very relevant. Repeatedly keep this whole verse of Scripture in mind as we study each part.

The Context of Acts 20:28

Reading this verse in the overall context in which we find it, the apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. He is accompanied by Luke and by at least seven other brethren with the special contributions from the Gentile churches to relieve the poor Jewish Christians who had suffered so much at the hands of their unbelieving countrymen (Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:19, 23; Acts 20:2-5; Acts 24:17; etc.). To avoid the Jews who planned mortal harm to him, Paul took

an alternate route through northern Greece (Macedonia). With those accompanying him going on ahead to Troas, Paul and Luke embarking from Philippi got up with them there (at Troas), and together they made their way along the coast of Asia Minor on their journey. Evidently traveling in a smaller vessel, the ship stopped at several ports along the way. Then having stopped at Miletus, Paul took advantage of this and sent word for the elders of the church at nearby Ephesus to join them there. This is the immediate context in which we find Paul. Now with the elders present, as Paul reviews his earlier work among them in Ephesus, while looking at the present and forebodingly on into the future, what he has to say takes on a decidedly somber tone (Acts 20:17-35). It is in the midst of this we read Acts 20:28. These words are addressed to the elders.

A Plurality of Elders

Acts 20:17 says that he sent and “called the **elders** of the church,” the plural “elders” corresponding with “take heed therefore unto **your-selves**” as he spoke to them in Acts 20:28. This shows there was a plurality of elders over a single local church. This is backed up by Acts 14:23 where it is said that they “ordained them **elders** in every church...” Philippians 1:1 likewise verifies this. God’s plan calls for a plurality of elders as the leaders in the local churches as they have been set in order (Titus 1:5). All of this constitutes a precedent for us today.

The “Therefore” of This Verse

The elders are admonished to “take heed **therefore**...” The “therefore” connects with everything that Paul has just said to them, with the more immediate words being, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Second Timothy 2:2 comes to

(Continued on Page 4)

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—THANK YOU—

Proverbially ***SPEAKING...***

LIFE is living for Christ.

When you “give out,” don’t “give in,” and then “give up.”

Prayer shows you really care.

To have a meaningful relationship with God is to put meaning into all of our other relationships.

To keep connected, expect the unexpected.

Many times people try to find contradictions in the Bible because there are contradictions in their lives.

Work is good therapy for the troubled soul.

If a false religion is your sacred cow, it needs to be slaughtered and sacrificed on the altar of truth.

It is hard to reason with unreasonable people.

That which has undergone terrific heat and pressure in its formation will stand up best under heat and pressure.

Accepting financial responsibility is part of being a Christian.

It is not on the mountain tops of arrogance that flowers grow or the rivers flow, but in the lowly valleys down below.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS



EXPLANATION OF LATE PAPER

YOU may wonder why you are receiving *The Sword and Staff* at this late date. Here is the answer. Speaking with the personal pronoun, I concisely continue. I was admitted to the Forsyth Hospital in Winston Salem January 22nd following a month of intense illness. Finally after many scans, etc. (of what was initially treated as ulcers) it was found that I had Lymphoma cancer. The doctors told me this was treatable, but not curable. By going through the Chemotherapy treatment process, the cancer (at my age, 80 years) should be in remission for the rest of my life. Now after 53 days of being in the hospital, with my dear wife Freda staying by my side 46 of them, we are back home (coming back March 15th). Things are looking up. We are optimistic about resuming the printing of *The Sword and Staff*. You should have received the paper or should be receiving the first issue for 2013 by now. However, when we fell ill it had not been sent to the printers (Editorial Comments had not been written) and consequently printed or mailed. So, when you finally do receive it, it will be a quarter behind. I will be involved with my Chemotherapy treatment process (with five more 21 days apart). So we are still around, and Lord willing, I plan to continue publishing *The Sword and Staff*, the printing of books, and getting out printed materials that are widely used. We appreciate the concern of those upon learning of our situation, responding with visitation and words of encouragement. So, that is the situation.—**James (Jim) E. Gibbons**

Where is Happiness?

Not in unbelief –

Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: “I wish I had never been born.”

Not in pleasure –

Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure, if anyone did. He wrote: “The worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone.”

Not in money –

Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying he said: “I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth.”

Not in position and fame – Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: “Youth is a mistake; manhood, mankind a struggle; old age a regret.”

Not in military glory –

Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept, because, he said, “There are no more worlds to conquer.”

Where, then, is happiness found? The answer is simple: In Christ alone. He said, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”

See: Ecc. 2:10-11; Luke 10:20; John 16:20-22



Learn to Stand Alone

IN ORDER to choose the narrow way that has only a few people on it and to reject the broad way that is crowded with people, we must learn to “stand alone” for what is right. This ability is vital, because when the world realizes that you are not going their way, they will put pressure on you to conform. Jesus spoke of this in his prayer: “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14).

To stand alone for God’s truth means to go against the crowd and make decisions based on what is right, not on what is popular at the moment. Our actions should not be merely reactions to people; they should be the results of wholehearted love for the Lord and a wholesome fear of him. (See Psalms 119:24-26). When we oppose those who are not asking us to go against our convictions, a spirit of meekness rather than condemnation is essential. (See 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Elijah stood alone when it seemed that the whole nation was rejecting God’s way. In the process, he learned a valuable lesson: there were 7,000 others who were silently standing with him. When we stand alone for truth, others are emboldened to follow our example.

Millions around the world revere the name Eric Liddell. He would have been a relatively obscure runner had it not been for his decision to stand alone. Representing Great Britain in the 1924 Olympic Games, he learned that the qualifying heats for his strongest event—the 100-meter race—would take place on Sunday. Because of his conviction to dedicate Sunday as a day...set apart for the Lord, he declined to run, thereby disqualifying himself for the finals.

He was questioned, misunderstood, and ridiculed for his decision to forfeit his participation in a race that he was likely to win. However, God is the One who writes last chapters. Eric ran in the 400-meter race instead, a distance he rarely ran

competitively, and not only won the gold medal but also set a new world record! In the end, his courage and success as a champion runner caused the world to stand up and cheer!

Being willing to stand alone for what is right is vital...It requires Scriptural convictions that we are willing to live for and, if necessary, die for. Are you committed—at all cost—to following the Lord on the narrow way? Are you prepared to stand alone when necessary.—*Selected* □



If I Knew You and You Knew Me

If I knew you and you knew me
As I know me and you know you,
Perhaps we less would disagree
And paths alike we would ensue.

If I knew you and you knew me,
What’s in your heart and what’s in mine,
Then both of us would likely see
Our thoughts, our aims are much in line.

If I knew you and you knew me,
And why we do the things we do,
We might more tolerating be
While right we do and wrong eschew.

If I knew you and you knew me,
And knowing what each has been through,
Our thoughts would less judgmental be,
And we’d forgive and start anew.

There is so much concealed from sight
That we know not, nor can we see,
But we would not in haste indict
If I knew you and you knew me.

By James E. Gibbons

**A Relationship
of LOVE and CONCERN**

IN THIS DAY AND TIME too many churches in their interchurch “fellowship” constitute a network of compromise wherein “a rising tide lifts all boats,” thus impeding faithfulness to the Lord’s cause. In such a context it would be better for local churches to exercise their God-given independence as local autonomous entities, being found faithful to the Lord, and in the meantime simply maintaining a restrained relationship of love and concern to the churches at large. □

A Treasure Trove of Truth



(Continued from Page 1)

mind as we read this. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Paul had committed these words to the Ephesian elders and now they were to take it from there. Likewise what he says in Acts 20:28 ties in with the next verses where “for” further explains and amplifies the “therefore.” Read it. They needed to do this to fortify the church against coming apostasy. They must be on their toes. Safe-guarding the church is their responsibility.

“Unto Yourselves, and to All the Flock”

This charge to these elders, “**Take heed** therefore **unto yourselves**, and **to all the flock**,” is very encompassing. It involved them personally maintaining their own spirituality with care and at the same time carefully accepting the responsibility of looking out for the spiritual wellbeing of the local church. In essence Paul said about the same thing to Timothy, his young preaching associate, in 1 Timothy 4:16. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” Elders and preachers must live what they teach, as well as verbally conveying it to others. Being leaders, they are to be examples to others as to how they should live (1 Peter 5:3; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

“To All the Flock, Over the Which...”

Notice it says that the elders were to “**take heed...to all the flock**,” and then it continues to state, “**over the which**” they had been made “**overseer**” (followed with the words, “**to feed**,” better represented by its full meaning, “**to tend**”). In other words, the elders have the responsibility of being over all of the church and over all phases and aspects of the work of the church. This includes the spiritual and what some call the “material” (as they would make such distinctions in reference to the work of the elders and deacons). In Acts 11:29-30 we see that elders are over the “material” as well as the “spiritual.” This Scripture reads, “Then the disciples [at Antioch], every man according to his ability, determined to send relief

unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” Deacons could well have been assigned in the distribution of this relief, but it was “sent to the elders.” They were in charge.

“The Flock” and “to Feed” (“Pastor”)

The words “flock” and “feed” next get our attention. They are related and share the same stem in the original language of the New Testament, along with the word that is elsewhere translated “shepherd” or “pastor.” The word “flock,” **poimnion** in the Greek, is correctly represented in our English versions as seen here (and especially having reference to sheep). The word “feed,” likewise before us in Acts 20:28, is **poimaino**. It includes the idea of “feed,” but has more of an extensive meaning. Newer translations render it “tend” and to “shepherd.” It includes all phases of the work of a shepherd in taking care of sheep. The 23rd Psalm well illustrates the wider meaning of this term in what a shepherd does. Elders are not only to feed (teach) the flock (church) the Word of God, they are to look out for its wellbeing in every way.

We said the primary stems of the words translated “flock” and “feed” are directly tied in with the word elsewhere translated “pastor” or “shepherd,” **poimen**. This term is rendered “shepherd” everywhere in the New Testament (KJV), except in Ephesians 4:11 where it is “pastor.” In 1 Peter 5:4 we find it in a context where the apostle Peter is talking about the elders. It appears as a compound word, with a defining prefix in front of it, **arch-poimen**. It is translated “chief Shepherd” (or if we used the language of Ephesians 4:11, it would be “chief Pastor”). The elders are admonished to do their job well as pastors, taking care of the Lord’s sheep. “And when the chief Shepherd [Pastor] shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Elders are underling “pastors” serving under the chief Pastor, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:1-16). The elders as “pastors” is what the related terminology is all about in Acts 20:28. Obviously there is much amiss in religious circles today in the practice of the denominational pastor system while men who are dubbed “elders” are anything but pastors (and many times really don’t even know what is taught in the Scriptures).

Made Overseers by the Holy Spirit

Continuing our study of Acts 20:28, Paul tells the Ephesian elders that “**the Holy Ghost [Spirit] hath made you overseers**” of the church. How are we to understand this? How did this take place?

Several things could be involved. Basically the eldership has been set up by God for the governance of his church, and this truth has been communicated to us by means of the Holy Spirit in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Through the eldership God wants the work that's entrusted to them done. Like the other positions mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, the eldership is a gift from Christ to the church (Ephesians 4:7-12, the eldership being represented here by the words "some, *pastors* and *teachers*"). By meeting the qualifications laid out in the Scriptures, men are made elders by the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). These qualifications are met by the fruit of the Spirit being produced in their lives (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9). In being filled with the Holy Spirit, and having a heart in tune to the will of God, men will be disposed to desire "the office" of the eldership (1 Timothy 3:1). Then in becoming elders, they will have been made "overseers" by the Holy Spirit, as these qualifications "must" be met (and have been met).

"Overseers" ("Bishops," *Episkopous*)

"Overseers," as seen here, represents another word that has reference to the eldership. This word in the singular is *episkopos*, elsewhere being translated "bishop" (Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:7). Titus 1:5-7 is very plain in showing that an elder and a bishop indicate the same position. Paul's co-worker Titus had been left on the island of Crete to set churches in order and "ordain *elders* in every city." As Paul instructs Titus about this, he lays down the qualifications to be met in becoming an elder, saying, "For a *bishop* must be blameless" etc. Here it is evident that the term "elder" and "bishop" are used interchangeably, referring to the same person (the same "office").

Also, contrary to what is all about us in the denominational world today, Acts 20:28 teaches that the early church had a plurality of bishops over one local church, not one bishop over a plurality of churches (called a diocese, district, or what-have-you). The opening salutation of the letter written to the single local church at Philippi reads, "Paul and Timotheus [Timothy], the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the *bishops* and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). This verse further verifies this truth and the structure of how God wants the church set up as a functioning body.

The Term "Church"

The term "church," as in the expression "to feed the *church* of God" (Acts 20:28) and meaning the

"called out" ones, actually is a word that had become technical in its usage, having reference to the body of Christian believers in the New Testament. Initially in the gospel accounts, in keeping with prophecy, the church is repeatedly spoken of as the "kingdom." But Jesus made the transition over to "church" in Matthew 16:13-19 when he said "upon this rock I will build my church." Then in the book of Acts (Acts 5:11; 8:1,3; 11:22,26; 12:1,5; 13:1; 14:23,27; 15:3,22; 18:22; 20:17,28) and the rest of the New Testament (*Examples:* Romans 16:1,16, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 15:9; Ephesians 3:21; 5:27; Colossians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Revelation 2:1,8, 12,18; 3:1,7,14; etc.) it is nailed down by Divine inspiration as the principle and most specific way of speaking of believers as a group.

That being the case, we are perplexed at the present trend in denominationalism of men wanting to call that which is supposed to be the church by other designations, such as "Ministries" (usually with some colorful adjectives prefixing it); etc. Is what God's Word teaches too boring for them? Really, He purchased the church with his own blood, not some "ministries."

**"The Church of God," A Most
Revealing and Instructive Expression**

Do you get the full impact of what Paul is saying here (Acts 20:28) when he said "the church of *God*," which he purchased with his own blood"? We know, reading elsewhere, that Christ purchased or redeemed the church with his own blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). But here "he," referring back to "God" in "church of *God*," is talking about Christ. This is ascribing deity to Christ! It accords with the prologue of John, which reads, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). Then on further down in this chapter it says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus said to his disciples, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). It is even as Paul declared in Colossians 2:9, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead [deity] bodily." How amazing and wonderful! God took on himself a human body, lived among us and died on the old rugged cross to take away our sins (to "purchase" the church with his own blood). What love! What mercy! What grace that the God of heaven would do this!

(Continued on Next Page)

A Treasure Trove of Truth



(Continued from Page 5))

And please notice again. He calls the church the “**church of God**,” not with some denominational designation (nor as a denominational designation). From Corinth, the apostle Paul sent greetings from units of local Christians of that area to fellow Christians at Rome, saying, “The churches of Christ salute [greet] you” (Romans 16:16). Earlier Paul had been greatly disturbed with the carnality and division that was in the church at Corinth, as different ones were saying, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12). Dealing with the situation, he asks, “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13) In his crucifixion Christ purchased the church with his own precious blood. It uniquely belongs to him. And individually bearing the name “Christian,” and not some denominational name, we are collectively the church of Christ. We gladly say that we are Christ’s church for “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We divest ourselves of all denominational names (and denominationalism itself) that “in all things” Christ will be the Lord of all and “have the pre-eminence” in all things (Colossians 1:18).

“Which He Hath Purchased with His Own Blood”

The word “**purchase**” here in the KJV could well be used with its more archaic meaning, that of simply to gain or acquire (not necessarily a transaction of actual buying having taken place). That is how the word is used in 1 Timothy 3:13, which reads, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well **purchase** to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” There is no literal buying that has taken place in the deacon advancing in his work. In fact, the NKJV translation words it like this, “For those who have served well as deacons **obtain** for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Yes, the Lord “obtained,” or came in possession of, the church by means of his blood. And parallel with the word “purchase” is the word “redeem,” figuratively taking on about the same significance as “purchase.”

The apostle Peter wrote, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation [way of living] received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Paul wrote to the Ephesians, saying, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). In this epistle, leading up to this, Paul had just before said that Christ “is the saviour of the body,” the church that he loved and “gave himself for” (5:23).

The Church Constitutes the Saved

All of these things being true, what are we to conclude about the church? The church constitutes the saved, and there is no salvation outside of the church that he purchased with his own blood. In possessing the church, that means those who became “members” of the church became this by virtue of being saved (in becoming a part of that church). In fact, we just noticed that he “is the saviour of the body,” the church (Ephesians 5:23). Furthermore, on the birthday of the church, the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, we are told that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved [who were being saved]” (Acts 2:47). Consequently and finally with the consummation of all things, we read in 1 Corinthians 15:24, “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.” We entered the church, the kingdom, in conversion (Colossians 1:13). Being in the kingdom, his church, we will get to go to heaven. Are you a part of that church the Lord “purchased” with his own blood? There is no salvation outside of it.

The “Blood,” the Vicarious Substitute

From the most ancient of times, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, blood has been of importance in man’s relationship to God. As we read, we find that death came to animals because of man’s sin. “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Then Cain “brought of the firstlings of his flock” in sacrifice to the LORD. We read of Noah (Genesis 8:20), and repeatedly of Abraham (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:4,18), Isaac, Jacob and their descendants building altars and offering animal sacrifices to God. The offering of animal sacrifices was incorporated into the Law of Moses. Leviticus 17:11 explains this. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you

upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” Therefore they were not to eat blood, it being used for this holy purpose. It seems that God allowed the animal to die in the place of man (for the wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23). The life’s blood of the animal symbolically took man’s place. Man should have died. Looking back, the writer of Hebrews said, “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). And as the writer of Hebrews further said that the Law had a “shadow of good things to come” (10:1), and not the reality (Colossians 2:17). The ultimate fulfillment of this symbolic prophesy was the coming of Christ, the sinless Lamb of God (John 1:29). He vicariously took our place. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is called grace.

**When Does the “Purchasing”
Transaction of the Church Take Place?**

As we wind down our study of Acts 20:28, we ask how that the church is actually “purchased” by the blood of Christ (for it says that he “hath purchased [the church] with his own blood”). We know that Christ dying on the cross has brought this all about (“while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” Romans 5:8). But when is the blood personally applied to our situation and when does this transition take place (that we are therewith and thereafter identified as his special possession embodied in the church)?

When We Repent and Are Baptized

A good place to start in answering these questions is the second chapter of Acts. Convicted sinners cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the *remission of sins*, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls,” and we further read, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be [were being] saved” (Acts 2:37-38, 41, and 47). When a believing and repentant sinner is baptized for the remission of sins, his sins are washed away (by the blood of Christ), and he is therewith added to the church by the Lord. It is that simple. He has been “purchased” by the blood of Christ. Didn’t Ananias say to Saul [Paul], even though he had been in prayer three days and nights (Acts 9:9-11),

“And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and *wash away thy sins*, calling on the name of the Lord”? In being baptized, we put on Christ as our sins are taken away (Galatians 3:27) and therewith we become a part of his body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 3:15). In being born of the water and the Spirit, using other terminology, we enter the kingdom (John 3:5). We are translated into the kingdom of Christ, God’s dear son (Colossians 1:13).

**“The Washing
of Water by the Word”**

A dual lesson is found on marriage and the church in Ephesians 5:22-33. That which Paul says here about the church fits in well with our study. Zeroing in on verses 25 through 27, this is helpful in understanding how the church is brought to be Christ’s own special possession. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it: That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Whereas Acts 2:38 deals with the *internal* that takes place when one repents and is baptized, i.e. *remission of sins* and receiving *the gift of the Holy Spirit*, this Scripture in Ephesians perhaps highlights the *external* in saying that the church is sanctified and cleansed “with the washing of the water by the word.” It is easy to see a parallel with baptism in the expression “the washing of water,” meaning the same as baptism, but what about “word”? What does it mean? The word for “word” here is not the commonly used word *logos* (which puts the emphasis on the meaning of the content of the word). The word for “word” here is *rhema*, which means utterance. Some see this meaning the utterance involved in preaching (Acts 18:8), putting the emphasis on the spoken sound, which leads men to be baptized (the washing of the water in connection with the uttered word); others, of what is said as the one is being baptized. Regardless,

(Continued on Next Page)



Why Afflictions Come

AFFLICTION comes to us all not to make us sad, but sober, not to make us worry, but wise; not to make us despondent, but by its darkness to refresh us, as the night refreshes the day; not to impoverish, but to enrich us, as the plough enriches the field; to multiply our joy, as the seed, by planting, is multiplied a thousand-fold.—*Beecher* □

A Treasure Trove of Truth *(Continued from Page 7)*

Paul says that in doing this, Christ is presenting unto “himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that is should be holy and without blemish.” The church has become his own. (And further in reference to this Scripture, others have suggested that overall there may be an allusion to the ancient practice of the purifying and cleansing of brides before they were presented in marriage to monarchs, Paul applying this thought to the church for purposes of illustration).

Thoughts in Conclusion

YES, this verse of Scripture (Acts 20:28), like almost every other verse of Scripture in the Bible, is filled with the manifold wisdom of God and leads us into many areas of thought. Each verse is a depository loaded with the inexhaustible treasures of God, his eternal truths, waiting to be retrieved, understood and enjoyed. Each word was inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Gaining deeper insights into the Word of God is a most exciting and rewarding experience. Truly, Acts 20:28 is a treasure trove of truth. Let us accept the challenge to look into each verse of the Bible accordingly. □



HOPE

HOPE is usually described with such visual metaphors as a ray, a beam, a glimmer of hope; the break in the clouds; the light at the end of a dark tunnel. It is often discovered in unexpected places and in unexpected ways.

Life is full of a series of challenges that we must face. Although these challenges may seem impossible at times, they are probably there for a reason. The storm makes the tree strong. Or, in another figure, it is the sandpaper that makes the wood smooth. We need to help our children learn the value of hope very early and in all they do. It sustains and gives reason to the most difficult tasks.

No matter what sort of adversity or challenge we face, we can always believe that, with hope, it can be conquered and, in the end, we will be stronger for having faced it. Life goes on regardless of circumstances. Despair is not only the opposite of hope, it is the enemy of hope. Eliminate that.—*The Light* □



Fleas in a Fruit Jar

AN EXPERIMENT was done once with fleas and an ordinary canning jar. A group of fleas was placed in the jar and the lid was left off. After a short time, all the fleas had successfully jumped out of the jar.

Another group was then placed in the jar, but this time the lid was placed on the top. For a while, the fleas consistently jumped high enough to hit the lid, but could not get out. Soon all the fleas were still jumping, but they were jumping just short of the lid. Once this happened the lid was removed. None of the fleas made it out of the jar. They had found their comfort zone and refused to challenge themselves. Many times we as Christians put lids on our own lives. Worse yet, we are sometimes guilty of putting lids on the minds of others.—*Selected* □

BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

1. The sons who were born from the incestuous relation of the two daughters of Lot with their father became what two nations of people?
2. What two women in the Bible died in giving birth and what woeful name did they give their sons?
3. How is manna described in the book of Exodus?
4. What is the name of a city in the Old Testament that can't be pronounced without spelling it, and can't be spelled without pronouncing it?
5. Ruth was the great grandmother of what outstanding man in ancient Israel?
6. What three times in the Old Testament did God say he would make something happen that when people heard about it, it would make their ears tingle?
7. In a family of seven sons and two daughters, where did David stand in sequence of being born with his brothers?
8. What psalm is said to have been written by Moses, dealing with hardships and brevity of life?
9. In what chapter of the book of Proverbs is the character of the virtuous woman extolled?
10. What two Old Testament prophets prophesied from Babylonian Captivity?
11. Which is the only gospel writer that tells about the virgin birth of Christ?
12. Where are the only three times the name “Jeremiah” occurs in the New Testament Scriptures?
13. What common message did John the Baptist and Jesus preach?
14. How many people do we find named “John” in the New Testament (and identify each of them)?
15. How many times did God speak audibly and directly from heaven in recognition of Christ (and what were the occasions)?
16. Where did Mary, Martha and Lazarus live who were good friends of Jesus?
17. What two members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who were secret disciples of Jesus, took charge of his body after his crucifixion to see that it was properly buried?
18. Where in the Bible does it plainly say that we are not saved (justified) by “faith only”?
19. What is worse than never becoming a Christian?
20. Which one of the seven churches in Asia in the book of Revelation was told they would have their candlestick removed unless they repented?

(NOTE: Answers found elsewhere in this issue of the paper)

READERS'

...Response

APOLOGY: Please accept our humble apology for slowness in getting correspondence answered. "We" have no staff of secretaries, etc. to handle such, and this is done by the "editor" as time allows. Be it known that you are sincerely appreciated. □

FLORIDA:

■ *"I pray for your continued health and strength to PRESS ON..."*

■ *"[I] appreciate your work and hope that I can influence others to avail themselves of the truths of God's Word that you so faithfully convey.*

"May God continue to bless you and keep you in His care."

GEORGIA:

■ *"I would like to be sent THE SWORD AND STAFF to this address...So I can work with the students at church. Thanks." (E-mail)*

■ *"The enclosed check is for help in printing and mailing. I appreciate your efforts to spread the truth, and your passion for it. So many individuals, preachers and churches have compromised. The 'Old Jerusalem Gospel' is always up to date!"*

SOUTH CAROLINA:

■ *"Thank you so much—your work continues!!!"*

MISSISSIPPI:

■ *"Thanks so much for sending the Word to so many. We would like these added to your mailing list. I'm enclosing a check...Maybe this will help with your expense. Also, a list is enclosed for bound volumes and booklets I would like. Thanks!"*

KENTUCKY:

■ *"Enclosed is a request for the literature offered. Also please accept the small contribution to your work.*

"I enjoy and benefit greatly from THE SWORD AND STAFF every time I receive one.

"Keep on in the work of the Lord. You are in our prayers daily."

VIRGINIA:

■ *"Let me say thank you again for your publication. Your recent issue about speech was most timely, as was its additional commentary about homosexuality and how that corrupt practice is all too prevalent. (Thank you also for questioning the motives and 'values' of a constituency that doesn't care about the morals and character of some of our elected officials. It's about time that someone did.)..."*

NEW YORK:

■ *"Thank you for sending volumes 37-46. I enjoy reading all the articles. They bless my heart as the articles are informative and inspiring. I am kindly adding gift...to help defray the cost of printing."*

MICHIGAN:

■ *"I praise God for giving you another good year of service for Him. The Lord is good. May He continue to bless you with health and the resources to keep on keeping on for Him. THE SWORD AND STAFF continues to be a premier, doctrinally sound, helpful publication."*

INDIANA:

■ *"[I] want you to know I enjoy the Scripturally conservative stand you take with your writings and studies..."*

■ *"I read THE SWORD AND STAFF from cover to cover each time I receive it. You have some great articles, and I think you are doing a great job. We need more people in our brotherhood writing good papers such as this."*

■ *"[I] am always on the lookout for solid Bible teaching material as what THE SWORD AND STAFF has. I just wish I had found your material (Bible studies) and good reading and teachings before now. You've got good stuff..."*

■ *"We had a discussion recently: Did Jesus take the Nazarite vow according to Numbers 6. I am aware in Matthew that he says Jesus was 'called a Nazarene, according to prophecy.' I am not aware of this prophecy being mentioned to reference. As such I assume it is a prophecy that did not get recorded for us in the Bible. Never the less according to Matthew it is prophecy, so it had to happen. I had always thought since he was called a Nazarene, it was not just because he grew up there, but possibly because he also took the Nazarite vow. Any opinion from you would be appreciated. I would appreciate your view on it." (E-mail)*

Answer: Following is an abridged version of an article that appeared in *The Sword and Staff* years ago. It should be helpful in answering the question you brought up. There is no evidence that Jesus was a Nazarite, in my humble understanding.

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS'...*Response*

(Continued from Previous Page)

IN WHAT SENSE IS SCRIPTURE "FULFILLED"?

THE 2ND CHAPTER of the gospel of Matthew is a good place to look to see various ways that Scripture is fulfilled.

(1) Direct or Literal Fulfillment. The wise men came from the east wanting to know where to find the Christ child. Troubled Herod consulted the chief priests and scribes, after which we read, "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matthew 2:5,6).

The exact words are found in Micah 5:2 with the additional comment, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This clearly has reference to the coming of God incarnate. Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. The fulfillment was direct and literal, the way that people commonly think of Scripture being fulfilled. And there are many such direct and wonderful prophecies in the Word of God. But this is not the only way that Scripture is fulfilled.

(2) Typical, Having a Basic Meaning and An Extended Prophetic Fulfillment. Because of the danger to the Christ child poised by the wicked Herod, Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream. Then we read, "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matthew 2:14,15).

This points back to Hosea 11:1 and Exodus 4:22. The Hosea reference reads, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." It is talking about the nation of Israel, but how can it apply to Christ? The nation of Israel was a type of Christ. It is what we call a typological fulfillment. Looking back now, many people, places, and things in the Old Testament are clearly seen with an enlarged significance. Through foreknowledge it was the Divine design that these be prophetic types and point to eternal realities and applications in the New Testament.

(3) Words Describing One Event Describe Another—An Analogical Fulfillment. When wicked Herod had the babies killed in Bethlehem following the birth of Jesus, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy [Jeremiah] the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning,

Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matthew 2:17,18).

Matthew calls this a fulfillment of what we read in Jeremiah 31:15, with Genesis 37 perhaps as part of a backdrop, picturing Rachel weeping for her children. Obviously this is not a direct prophecy, nor does it seem to be a type. In what sense then were the words spoken by Jeremiah "fulfilled"? It was from Ramah that Jeremiah saw the people taken away into Babylonian Captivity when he was released (Jeremiah 39:11,12; 40:1; 31:15). There was weeping and mourning as this took place, even as "Rachel weeping for her children." The words describing the first event in what Jeremiah saw and heard fittingly describe the second (the lamentation in connection with the death of the babies in Bethlehem); they are very similar. The Scripture was fulfilled, not as direct prophecy, but as an illustration of a like tragic and distressful situation. The meaning of words are fulfilled, not a prediction.

(4) Fulfillment in a General Sense. We read in Matthew 2:23, "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." These words refer to when Joseph and Mary came back from Egypt with the Christ child. When they learned that one of the Herod family who was also notorious was on the throne, they went on to live in Nazareth of Galilee. Their doing this, and consequently Jesus being called a "Nazarene," is spoken of as Scripture being "fulfilled." A search of the Old Testament will not find such a reference.

Thus, this is understood in a general sense as Matthew speaks of "the prophets." Some see a tie in with Isaiah 11:1, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Isaiah 53:2 reads, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." A "Nazarene" perhaps speaks of the lowly circumstances of his background (including where he lived). The question is asked in John 1:46, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

So, in this case the Scripture was fulfilled more in the general sense of the spirit of what the prophets said about the lowly background of Jesus the Christ (rather than in a specific prediction).

YES, it is an interesting study to look up all references to Scripture being fulfilled in the New Testament or the quotation of the said Old Testament Scripture in the New Testament and its application. When doing this, keep the 2nd chapter of Matthew in mind as sort of a key to the use of the word "fulfill." It is not always a literal fulfillment,

but such use as the Holy Spirit made of the word. Looking back, prophecy written in the context of the Old Testament usually bears the image and flavor of the Old Testament even when it is talking about things to come in the New Testament age. Many of the Jews missed out because they could not and would not harmonize their literal, and many times wooden, interpretations with what Christ and the apostles taught. It turned out that Christ's mission in coming to earth was a spiritual one.

IOWA:

■ *"[W]e really appreciate your work of writings, the messages, and may people read and heed. Help us all to do, do, do for Him..."*

MISSOURI:

■ *"Having been a Christian since 1957 and having read your publication for several years, I whole heartedly embrace your agreement with the Scriptures as you consistently set forth in THE SWORD AND STAFF..."*

■ *"I am thankful for your ministry of THE SWORD AND STAFF which our Lord has used wonderfully these many years. The articles are Biblical and often prove thought-provoking and helpful. May our dear Lord continue to bless you, to use you, and to meet your needs."*

■ *"Issue 50, Number 4, 2012 was recently received and, as usual, I very much enjoyed reading 'Life, Death and Life Hereafter.' Though a fairly new subscriber, I've been a reader for many years, having had the issues passed on to me by my late father. I am very appreciative of your efforts in producing the paper. It is one of the best of the numerous religious publications..."*

NEBRASKA:

■ *"I thank the Lord for THE SWORD AND STAFF and the depth of your writings."*

"Please send me 6 of the 'Study in the Sanctity of Human Sexuality.'"

"Please add these names to your mailing list..."

COLORADO:

■ *"Thanks for all your good work with this publication..."*

■ *"Praise the Lord! Thank you for your continued publication of THE SWORD AND STAFF..."*

■ *"I am sending a small donation and once again requesting that you add 3 more names to the mailing list...Thanks again for your sound Bible teaching. I read one and check the Scriptures. You are 'right on'."*

WASHINGTON:

■ *"Thank you so much. I've been reading your paper since I was in high school, over 40 years. God bless you all."*

UNITED STATES:

■ *"I just discovered this morning from my most recent SWORD AND STAFF that two more of the years [of the bound volumes] are no longer available! My loss for procrastination in ordering the first time. Sending a check out tomorrow for the bound volumes (whatever is available by the time you receive the check anyway). Looking forward to having your writings as part of my library. Blessings to you from our Father..."*

■ *"I first want to say that I really enjoy THE SWORD AND STAFF. An elder at church gave me a copy years ago and I've been hooked ever since."*

"I read through the Bible each year and I'm currently in the gospels where the Sadducees were questioning Jesus about marriage and the resurrection."

"My question is: What does 'given in marriage' mean? And what did Jesus' answer to them mean?"

"If you can help me with this I sure would appreciate it." (E-mail)

Answer: It is really great hearing from you and to know of your interest and commitment to reading God's Word. Personally, I never tire of reading it. If we approach the Bible anew each time, just like we had never read it before, we will keep getting insights that we have never had before.

In reference to your question, using the account in Matthew 22:30 ("For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."), it seems he is talking about the man and the woman, the man marries, and the woman was given in marriage by her parents to the man in Bible times. That was their practice. So this statement, "neither marry [the man], nor are given in marriage [the woman]" would encompass both sexes as they enter into marriage. In eternity we will not have the same setup as God has arranged here in our physical bodies between the sexes on earth, nor will we be having children, but will be as the angels in heaven in this regard.

Of course, Jesus, in answering the Sadducees, is referring to a custom in Old Testament times (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) and also that was practiced before in the Patriarchal Age (Genesis 38:7-10). If a married man died without fathering children, his next unmarried brother was to marry his widow and the first son born of this union would be regarded as the son of the deceased brother so that his name would not die out in the land. Also, the inheritance left by the deceased and childless brother would fall to this son. With this knotty question the unbelieving Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection) thought they would "trip up" Jesus, if he tried to answer it. But he wisely answered them, and they turned out to be the ones to not look so "good."

GREECE:

■ *"Thank you so much for sending me your very well written THE SWORD AND STAFF. I pray and hope the best for your service to the Lord in the New Coming Year 2013.*

"I have noticed there is a great demand for 'A Study in the Sanctity of Human Sexuality.' If convenient, please send me a few copies of 5 to 10 along with your next mailing to me. God bless you for your great diligence and hard work!" (E-mail)

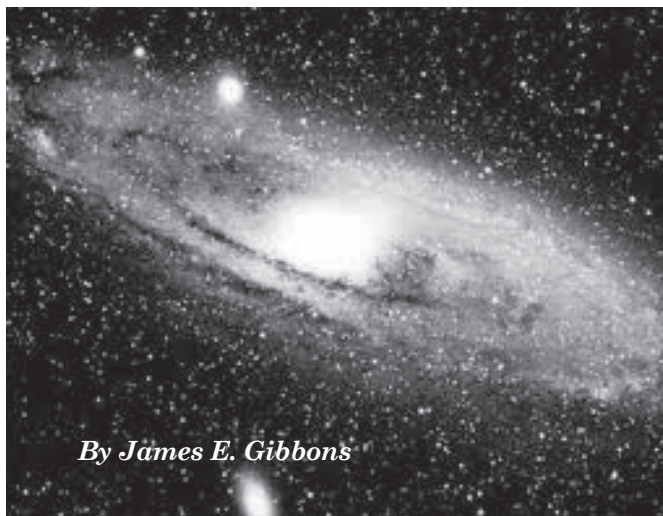
■ *"Thank you very much for all the very good quality items sent to me and received on Dec.24. They all will be a blessing to me and many others. God Bless." (E-mail)*

ZIMBABWE:

■ *"I'm very interested in reading books from you. Thank you and may God bless you." (E-mail)*



That Which is Beyond Us



By James E. Gibbons

(This article appeared 39 years ago in this publication)

BEING SPECIAL and favored creatures made after God's own image, there are many things about God and divine thing we can know.

- We can know God, that he is, and many things about him through faith, the Scriptures, and his creation (Psalms 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-22; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6; John 17:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

- We can know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, manifested in the form of man to take away mankind's sins (John 1:1-18,29; John 7:17; John 20:30,31; 1 John 3:5; 1 John 5:20).

- We can know the will of God for man, what is expected of man (John 8:31,32; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Ephesians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:2-10).

- We can know about man's relationship with God, just where man stands before God (1 John 2:3-6; 3:14; 5:18-20).

Yes, we can know many things about God and his plan for us, and, furthermore, as Christians we are admonished to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18)—to keep right on learning and knowing more.

Although there are many things we can know (involving that which is essential), what we know is like looking into space, like looking at the ocean. The familiar is all around us, but it soon blends into the unknown. Too many times, instead of standing in awe before God like the psalmist (Psalms 8), we have made him over in the likeness of our human image. His divine plan has become the work of man, as we try to reduce and confine the Divine to a human level.

We wish to point out some Scriptures which in turn will point out that there is much beyond us as human beings beyond our full comprehension. I

"THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST" (Ephesians 3:8)

Paul was overwhelmed, as he felt so unworthy, that to him was given the blessed privilege of preaching the "unsearchable riches of Christ." This same word "unsearchable" in Romans 11:33 is translated (KJV) "past finding out." It means that which cannot be traced out; that which cannot be comprehended.

That which is "unsearchable" is the "riches in Christ." Riches signify wealth, fullness in abundance, plentitude. Paul had been talking about Gentiles becoming "fellow-heirs" of the things of God through Christ.

Oh, my beloved, God's storehouse of all the riches pertaining to salvation has never been, nor can it be, really (and fully) inventoried by man. What is in store for us as fellow-heirs of the riches of Christ is so great it is incomprehensible. It is wonderful beyond imagination.

II. "THANKS BE UNTO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT" (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Paul had been giving instructions concerning the gifts and offerings to be taken up for the impoverished Christians back in Palestine. He couldn't finish his words on this subject without exclaiming, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

This word "unspeakable" means that words fail when they are used in an effort to describe or commemorate. They are inadequate to get the point across. And, of course, "gift" signifies that which is free, for naught, gratis.

(Continued on Page 14)

Fanny Crosby

FANNY CROSBY gave us more than 8,000 gospel songs, although she was blinded at the age of 6 weeks. A preacher once remarked, "I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when he showered so many other gifts upon you." She quickly replied, "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?" "Why?" asked the surprised preacher. "Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!"—*Selected* □



BARBS ...with a POINT

GRACE does not nullify obedience.

Shallow people respond primarily to emotion; people of depth respond to facts.

Dead wood is ready for burning (John 15:6).

Zeal without knowledge is like a derailed train still in motion after it has left the tracks.

It takes a real Christian to be a Christian.

Before you can help lift someone from the mire of sin, you must be on higher ground yourself.

Christian, is your life a reflection of Christ, or a reflection on Christ?

Beware of the person who says that he has nothing to lose in a reckless venture for very likely he has already lost it all.

Being "dirt poor" is no excuse for being dirty (morally or otherwise).

If you are really clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14; Colossians 3:10), your spiritual life will not be threadbare.

When a society gets full of slackers and loafers, it is ready for socialism.

You may have a "right" (?) to be wrong as a free-moral agent, but please don't try to impose the wrong upon the rest of us.

The church that becomes wed to the world obviously is no longer the bride of Christ.

Really, Christianity and patriotism are not synonymous and should not be mixed in the context of the church, which is made up of people from all nations of the earth (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 10:34-35; Colossians 3:11-12).

The practice of homosexuality is not a matter of "rights," but a matter right and wrong.

An obsessive preoccupation with prophecy in trying to determine the future and human events is not unlike witchcraft.

Most people "believe" what they want to believe, or disbelieve, regardless of what the Bible says.

If "everybody" is doing it, that is no reason for us to do it; in fact, that makes it more questionable as to whether we should do it (Matthew 7:13-14).

Preachers today, instead of being ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), are more like diplomats.

We fail to find a precedence in the New Testament of a single mega-church with multi-campus in multi-places, which would appear much like a small-scale diocese.

People who are always preoccupied with being "cool" are in danger of ending up where it's not so cool.

Water seeks its own level, which always is the lowest level possible, and fallen man left to himself without any restraining influence is inclined in the same direction.

Never forget where you came from when you get where you are going.

The more we get away from the concept and function of the church as an independent and an autonomous local entity, the more we are headed back to denominationalism.

If the Bible is dry and uninteresting to you, and you claim to be a Christian, obviously you have a spiritual problem.

When you compromise the truth to accommodate your wayward children, you don't give them anything to come back to (and, in fact, you become a stumbling block to their recovery).

Those who have an ear to hear, will hear, and those who don't, won't. □

Trust in God

There is so much that we don't understand;
So wisely let us leave it in God's hand,
The One who knows the ending from the start
And what resides in each and every heart.

God can take that which seems so very bad
And make it be in time with goodness clad;
That which was bad had only seemed that way,
And that which we thought was night brought
on the day.

So never let a child of God despair,
But simply trust and leave it in His care;
God sees it all, eternal in its scope;
So trust in Him and live each day in hope.

By James E. Gibbons

That Which is Beyond Us

(Continued from Page 12)

God's unspeakable gift to man is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Grace is another word for this (Ephesians 2:8). Human language cannot begin to convey the fullness of this gift and the resultant blessings and glory for man. Oh, what Jesus went through to purchase our salvation, and what this means to us! Praise be to God!

III. "AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST, WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE, THAT YE MIGHT BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD" (Ephesians 3:19)

What a command! This command is open-ended. It seems like a paradox. We are commanded to know something that passes knowing—"know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." It is like the blue sky. We see it, know it's there, and enjoy it; yet it blends into space and into eternity, which is beyond our knowledge. The more we know the love of Christ, the more we find that there is so much that we don't know about it. "The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell." How wonderful! How amazing!

Perhaps the best way to know the love of Christ is through experience. First, what the Lord Jesus Christ has done "hits" us intellectually. We think about it with our mortal minds. Then, as we surrender our rebellious natures to this love, to know its cleansing and forgiveness, it pervades our very being, our souls, our personalities. Love is the transformation and the producing of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost [Spirit] which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 3:14).

Love cannot be confined to a human mold, and it be said, "This is all of it." As we begin to comprehend a little of it, we find there is so much more involved than we ever imagined. May we seek to know that which passes knowing, and be transformed in the process. The more we love, the greater our capacity to love becomes.

IV. "WHOM HAVING NOT SEEN, YE LOVE: IN WHOM, THOUGH NOW YE SEE HIM NOT, YET BELIEVING, YE REJOICE WITH JOY UNSPEAKABLE AND FULL OF GLORY" (1 Peter 1:8)

John said, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love is a responding love, brought about in response to Divine love. Obedient faith and a response to this Divine love has brought us into a most wonderful relationship. The thrill and joy of forgiveness is beyond words—again, "unspeakable." When the

Ethiopian came up out of the waters of baptism, he "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:35-39). And men are still experiencing the same joy when they come to the Lord.

The epistle of 1 Peter was written to Christians in the midst of suffering. He reminded them that they had "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you [them]" (1 Peter 1:4). Even though they were going through the fiery trials, they could "greatly rejoice" (verse 6)—even with "joy unspeakable." With stripes on their back, confined to the enter prison and with stocks on their feet, "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:22-25). Some of the greatest times of rejoicing come to Christians during suffering. Real things have been made more real to them. Their hope is made alive. They know whether they live or die, there is no way a Christian can lose.

And this is joy unspeakable and full of glory. The joy in believing is a joy that can be found nowhere else in this old world, for it is not of this world. The best is yet to come.

V. "AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING, SHALL KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS" (Philippians 4:7)

Again John tells us, "Perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). Fear is a negative attitude; love is a positive one. There can be no contentment with this kind of fear, because contentment is positive.

Paul said, "Be careful [full of care, anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). It was following this verse that he said that "the peace of God, which passeth understanding" would keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

It is only when we let the love of God fully come into our hearts, and when we learn to unreservedly cast all of our cares upon him (1 Peter 5:7), (nothing is too small to make a matter of prayer); yes, it is only then, and then, that this peace of God which passes all understanding will keep our hearts and minds. We can stand as a tower of tranquility while the storms of life sweep about us.

It is a peace that passeth understanding—it is beyond us. May this peace be ours. It should rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). "O How Sweet to Trust in Jesus!"

VI. "O THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS AND HIS WAYS PAST FINDING OUT" (Romans 11:33)

Let us get the full quotation as Paul ponders (and breaks out into glorious expression) the providential ways of the Almighty God: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

Many centuries before these words were written, Isaiah wrote along the same line of thought: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thought than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Just think who God is, and then who we are (and are not). It staggers the imagination. He is indeed the Almighty God. He is Supreme Intelligence. He is infinite in all things. He knows the end from the beginning. Time means nothing to him. But we are frail, insignificant, fallen creatures whose thoughts are marred by sin, living out our days in the face of death.

Conclusion

YES, there are many things we can know about God and the Lord Jesus Christ (that which we need to know and that which he wants us to know). We can know what he expects of us as his creatures, and we can know if we are right with him or not (know all that is essential to salvation). But in the midst of all that we can know, and do know, there is so much that we don't know—it is beyond us. There is that which is "unsearchable," "unspeakable," that which passes "knowledge," and "understanding."

It seems to this unworthy writer, as fallen humanity, that much humility on our part is in order. There is no room for boasting. There is no occasion for vaunting ourselves. Let us beware lest we become like the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. Let us bow our knees before the Almighty and Holy God of eternity. Amen.—*Adapted* □

"Anyway"

PEOPLE are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motive. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, they may cheat you. Be forthright anyway.

What you spend years building, they may destroy overnight. Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous and scorn. Be joyous anyway.

The good you do today, they often will forget tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give the world the best you have anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and GOD. It was never between you and them any.—*Selected* □

"Love One Another" (John 13:34)

Faith and Works

FAITH AND WORKS should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again—until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other. —*William Booth*

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BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Genesis 19:29-38; 2. Genesis 35:16-18; 1 Samuel 4:17-22; 3. Exodus 16:31; 4. Joshua 7:2; 5. Ruth 4:9-22; 6. 1 Samuel 3:11; 2 Kings 21:12; Jeremiah 19:3 (Read the context of these Scriptures); 7. 1 Chronicles 2:13-16; 8. Psalms 90; 9. Proverbs 31; 10. Ezekiel and Daniel; 11. Matthew; 12. Matthew 2:17; 16:14; 27:9; 13. Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; 14. (1) John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1); (2) The apostle John (Matthew 10:2-4; (3) John (Jonas) the father of the apostle Peter (John 1:42; 21:15-17; (4) John of the high priest's family (Acts 4:6); (5) John Mark (Acts 12:12); 15. (1) Matthew 3:16-17; (2) Matthew 17:1-5; (3) John 12:27-30; 16. John 11:1; 17. John 19:38-42; (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-56); 18. James 2:24; 19. 2 Peter 2:20-22; 20. Revelation 2:1-5 (1:20). □

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