

DESTINY BULLETIN

A commentary sent to the supporters of the ministry of Christian Destiny.

Dear “Special Friend” of Christian Destiny,

August 2005

THE IMPERATIVE OF KNOWLEDGE

Faith is the beginning of spiritual success. Once we have begun in faith, we need virtue to establish the moral direction of our lives. Unless that direction is established, what we do will be of little consequence. Our greatest efforts, finest plans, and noblest aspirations will be exercises in futility until we establish our moral direction. We must say, “God helping me, I will walk worthy of my high calling.” We must add to our faith virtue.

Now Peter calls us to the next imperative knowledge. Earlier in his letter, Peter congratulated his readers because they had received the gift of eternal life “*through the knowledge of Him,*” that is, Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:3). Here he commends them for having the kind of knowledge imperative to salvation itself. When talking of this knowledge, Peter uses the word *epignosis*, which means “full knowledge.” In the “full knowledge” of Christ, we have received His gift of eternal life. We have full and free salvation. So thrilling is the possession of the full knowledge that produces salvation that Peter takes another moment to expand on it. The knowledge of Christ, he says, will bring us “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (II Peter 1:3). When one has Christ he has it all! Later, when Peter tells us to expand our knowledge as Christians, he uses a different form of this word. Up to this point, however, he uses the word in the sense of “knowledge to which nothing can be added”—knowledge that is complete, perfect, full.

This definition of knowledge stands in contrast to a doctrine that has gained currency in our time. It is the notion that an experience subsequent to salvation is needed to bring us the “full salvation” we did not have, or had only partially, when we were saved. The teaching suggests that there is some qualitatively different form of the Christian life, sometimes called deeper, wider, fuller, or another qualifying name. This suggests that God reserves a qualitatively different form of life for the deeper Christian.

Indeed, there are a hundred names for this position in Christendom, and we can be sure that new ones will continue to be invented. Often they are presented to the inquirer by someone who professes to have discovered “the blessed secret” or some other hidden knowledge. These previously undisclosed spiritual secrets are presented to the current generation of Christians as something new that was unknown and even unsuspected in the past. Such assertions to mystical forms of knowledge are to be avoided. They tend to be more cultic than Christian. First, they are without basis in Scripture. Indeed, Scripture teaches that when we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ we are, at the same time, “*blessed. . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3). Therefore, we are complete in Him in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9).

THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

In Scripture, the essence of Christianity is described as “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27). Christ in me is not only all that I need, but He is all that there is.

In the full knowledge of Christ, we have complete, full salvation. To this salvation there is nothing to be added. Eternal life is assuredly mine because of “Christ in me.” Fears of incompleteness are, therefore, unfounded. They will produce only unending confusion and frustration for the seeker. Believers who succumb to such teaching join those who are ever seeking and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. How different it is for the true Christian. Knowing Christ, he rests in full salvation. But now, having congratulated us on this knowledge to which we cannot add, Peter still advises us to add knowledge to our

faith and virtue. Here he uses the word *gnosis*. This means knowledge that is not necessarily complete. It is growing knowledge. “Keep thinking,” he in effect says. “Keep studying. Stimulate those intellectual appetites. You have a brain; use it!”

The intellectual life of the Christian requires more thought than we may give it. There remains an excessive amount of what might be called wrong-headedness among believers concerning the place of intellect and the proper source of knowledge. On one side, there is mere intellectualism. Many Christians, especially those saved in middle life, confess to having had excessive confidence in human knowledge. Intellectualism is the common faith of the unregenerate man. Having only the intelligence of this world, he trusts too much in human knowledge. He believes that science is the custodian of final truth and is to be trusted fully.

Those who tend to overly trust intellectualism need to learn again the limitations of knowledge. No one in this world knows the ultimate nature of things. We do not know what time is, what electricity is, what light is, what the essential building blocks of matter are, or what life itself is. No one knows why we wake up in the morning after sleeping or how the mind, which is immaterial, influences the body, which is material. We actually know—in a human sense—only pitifully few things. Beyond that, we know nothing. One who places his ultimate trust in human knowledge is sadly deceived. Every automobile accident, every psychiatric clinic, every cemetery demonstrates that the human brain, with its “natural” thought processes, is neither infallible nor eternal.

THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN

On the other side, some Christians maintain an attitude of extreme anti-intellectualism. They oppose all rationale. These unfortunate people have rejected study, schooling, and serious thinking as being nearly un-Christian. Too often they live their lives on a relatively small number of simple propositions and may even be susceptible to exploitation by a messianic leader. Such people often have no intellectual, rational defense against heresy, false doctrine, spiritual subversion, or other forms of cultic influence. They may go so far as to become snake handlers, poison takers, book burners, or pursuers of other forms of foolishness. Being anti-intellectual, they are drawn into a thoughtless form of biblical interpretation.

Similar mistaken theologies are produced by those who invent substitutes for real knowledge. These can include “great” experiences, ecstatic emotional involvements, unforgettable visions, voices in the night, or other subjective notions. Those who subscribe to such things resent the rigorous call in the Scripture to “*prove all things*” (*I Thess. 5:21*) or to be sure that everything is established in the mouth of two or three witnesses (*II Cor. 13:1*). For many of them, even the authority of Scripture is relegated to a position inferior to “what God told me last night.”

So we see that an anti-intellectual attitude is full of spiritual danger. Of course, all believers are not called upon or equipped to become theologians, but all are called upon to read, to study, and to know the Word. Each believer must consider the Word so as to become a dependable interpreter and communicator of Scripture, even to the extent that he is able to teach others. To the extent of our ability, we are to become intellectual participants in the battle for truth.

We are to add to our virtue knowledge. Where, then, do we find this knowledge? Certainly, above all other sources available, we must look to the source of source—the sacred pages of Scripture. Here we have available to us the Word of the living and true God. Here, in these sacred pages, God has given us the greatest of all treasure houses of wisdom. Not to avail ourselves of that wisdom is to deny ourselves a necessary component of spiritual success and to assure that we shall live in intellectual poverty.

Structured study is foundational to knowledge. No Christian is mature until he has learned to study the Bible for himself and can trust his conclusions. The individual must come to the place where he can read, know, and be confident to his own convictions concerning the Word of God. He must become a student of the Word, not merely a follower of someone else’s teaching. In fact, genuine progress in the Church and its call to evangelize the world will not be made short of this. Teachers and leaders must not aspire

to simply gain disciples for themselves and with them construct a kingdom. Rather, they must produce students who will themselves become teachers and produce other students who will teach others also. As knowledge is given to us in ever-increasing measure, we are to become teachers of the Word (Heb. 5:12). Second to learning from the study of the Word itself is careful attention to biblical preaching.

The preached Word brings an additional source of spiritual profit. Preaching is a combination of teaching, illustration, application, admonition, encouragement, and hearing. Happy is the Christian who has the regular opportunity to hear good expository preaching. People and nations have been lifted from danger, poverty, and despair by the powerful preaching of the Word of God.

A personal reservoir of biblical and world knowledge becomes the data against which we can measure each message. It is difficult for one with no basic knowledge to add to his knowledge. Conversely, the knowledgeable mind can multiply its knowledge with every new thought that comes. *“Unto every one that hath shall be given”* is certainly true. Conversely, *“from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath”* (Matt. 25:29). In few ways is this more applicable than in the pursuit of knowledge. A small improvement can be multiplied into a great gain; the near empty mind is difficult to teach at all.

A CALL TO REFLECTIVE THINKING

Additional knowledge comes to us through the practice of reflective thinking. Facts are rarely usable until they have been made to fit the truths already there. Reflective thinking is a constant process. We hear something and find ourselves saying, “That just cannot be true.” Then we hear a fact that instantly rings true, and we grasp it immediately and insert it into the puzzle of life. Adding new pieces of the puzzle is what education is all about. No number of facts will produce this result. One who does not discriminate between various sources of information is intellectually lazy and will be forever naive. The call to reflective thinking is extended to us in the Word. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and admonished them to live above anxiety, promising the peace of God as the alternative to worry and frustration. What is the key to avoiding that frustration? Is there a course we can take in pursuit of the high road? The answer is yes.

We find the key to that pursuit in these words: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”* (Phil. 4:8-9).

Paul lays out a program that can be both therapeutic and sustaining. The believer can ask himself daily, “Have I thought today on the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, praiseworthy, and of encouraging report?” A mind filled with these things cannot go far wrong. It is well known that we tend to become like the object of our contemplation. Contemplation on these virtues must inevitably make our lives things of quality as well.

Great books are another source of knowledge. The best of them should be read—some more than once. If you have never walked through the wicket gate in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, you have deprived yourself of a rewarding experience. Augustine’s *City of God* still has much to say to Christians today. Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ* provides an applicable pattern for our lives. No one should miss *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, who has also given us *The Screwtape Letters*.

In our quest, we must not disregard another possible source of knowledge—one that is, perhaps, more readily available than any other. It is intelligent conversation. Intelligent conversation is free, it is fascinating, it is food for the soul and fine tuning for the fertile mind. The interaction between two intelligent Christian minds going in the same direction is one of life’s most precious gifts. Remember that good, stimulating conversation is a two-way street. Proper conversations do not consist of one always asking questions and the other always answering. Each of us must bring some contribution. That is not as difficult as it may sound. Each of us knows some facts that are unique to us. We can memorize a little poetry, read

an unknown book, check some data that might not be generally known. Possessing that, we will become a valued member of any circle of intelligent and stimulating conversation. Pursuing this course, any one of us can be a source of spiritual profit to ourselves and others. The principle of Scripture that says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38), applies to more than just the coin of the realm. Give of yourself, of the best thoughts of your mind, and the results will be to your spiritual profit. Intelligent Christian conversation has the potential to benefit us all.

Scripture calls us to obtain yet another aspect of knowledge. It is the knowledge of God’s will. The apostle Paul said, “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). Knowledge of God’s will gives us spiritual purpose. Without that knowledge our lives will be aimless and meaningless. Unfortunately, even within the Body of Christ, too many believers are milling about, buttonholing others, asking the old questions, reciting the slogans, and hesitating to move. For lack of knowledge, their lives are impotent. In fact, in admonishing us to be knowledgeable, Paul said, “Be not unwise.” He used a strong Greek word that can be translated “Mindless.” By this, Paul implied that the one who does not know the will of God is, in fact, without a mind. We can be sure that the purpose of our ability is to know and do the will of God. Knowledge is not merely the accumulation of a set of facts, but it is the ingestion of the data that it takes to know and then to do the will of God.

THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

Few principles can be more valuably emphasized in life. In this day of wide dissemination of facts concerning Christianity, many believers have developed a commendable repository of knowledge. Such knowledge is a valuable asset. However, there comes a time when the asset turns into a liability. Knowledge, even biblical knowledge, can cause us to be proud, puffed up, and unduly impressed with ourselves. We can spend our time arguing about the fine points rather than witnessing to the faith of the Gospel. Warning us repeatedly of this danger, the Bible insists that we are to be not only hearers of the Word but doers also (James 1:22). One who hears, who becomes knowledgeable, but does not share his knowledge is risking spiritual stagnation. We are told in the Word that to whom much has been given, much shall be required. True about many things, this principle is eminently true about the possession of knowledge. To possess knowledge is to possess responsibility to bring that knowledge to those ignorant of the Word of God and of the message of salvation.

Knowledge is essential in helping us avoid the spiritual subversion that is coming upon the Church with tremendous force in these last days. The Church is being bombarded with mounting waves of unsound doctrine, bad theology, cultic views, occult practices, and human philosophies. The Christian community must heed the warnings of Scripture and diligently pursue the knowledge that can protect it from spiritual subversion. Throughout Church history, the enemy has lurked in the shadows at the edge of the lighted circle that is Christianity, ready to steal the young, weak, and ignorant away from Christ.

Our need to understand Scripture and practice sound doctrine becomes more apparent as we move toward the end of the age. We are warned that new forms of spiritual subversion will come upon believers in the latter days: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (I Tim. 4:1). Believers untutored in sound doctrine will be vulnerable to the point of giving heed to doctrines of demons. We can be sure that Satan will promote his lies more forcefully when he has the opportunity.

Many of us are surprised at the bizarre doctrines and preposterous promises of modern religionists. I am more surprised at the thousands—even millions—of people who have no more sense than to buy into their package at a price, of course. For want of knowledge, people are allowing false teachers to deceive and exploit them. They are unable to discern between lies and hypocrisy and truth. We need a revival of knowledge to save us from Satan’s lies. The pursuit of knowledge is not an extravagance; it is one of the keys to spiritual survival and success.

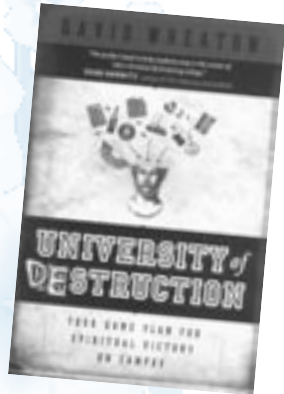
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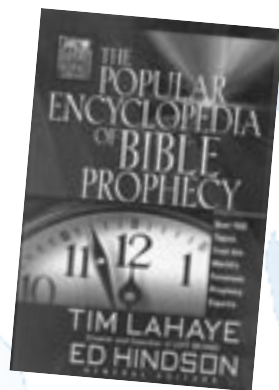
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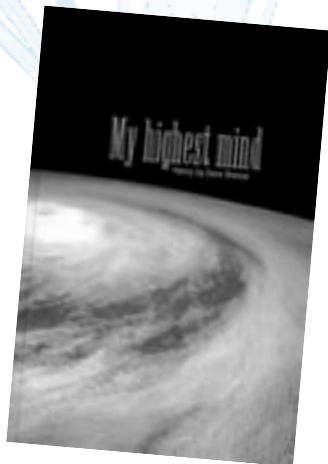
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