

## IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE

Several years ago we wrote an article in which we asked, “Why would an ignoramus boast?” The article pointed out that “Webster defines an ignoramus as ‘an utterly ignorant person’ Why would anyone boast of being an ignoramus? There are thousands of intelligent people who do just that. Their boast is supposedly a mark of sophistication, but in reality, it is a mark of their ignorance. When people proudly speak of being an agnostic, they are in fact saying they are an ignoramus. The word agnostic literally means without knowledge” and an agnostic says we cannot know for certain when it comes to the things of God.

How many times have we heard “ignorance is bliss” or “what you don’t know can’t hurt you?” This is a dangerous attitude when applied to Scripture. We can understand the world’s ignorance of the things of God because they are “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart...and have become callous...” (Eph. 4:19). However ignorance among the people of God is without excuse. Ignorance is disobedience, and sins committed in ignorance in Israel had to be dealt with and demanded sacrifice: “into the second (tabernacle) only the high priest enters, and not without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance” (Heb. 9:7). Even worship can be worship in ignorance (Acts 17:23). It was a lack of knowledge that destroyed Israel and took them into captivity: “Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge” (Isa. 4:3, Hos. 4:6). One of the appalling phenomena evident in today’s church is the rampant ignorance and lack of understanding of the Scriptures. It is heartbreaking to behold so many young men coming out of our Bible Colleges and Seminaries with only scant understanding of the Word of God.

By just a casual reading of Paul’s Epistles we are struck with the many times he prays that his converts may have wisdom, knowledge and understanding of the will of God. Many times he emphasizes the importance of not only knowing but understanding the will of God. He also prays that his readers may have wisdom, knowledge, and be enlightened about the things he is writing. He states that “the mystery of Christ in other generations was not made known...but now has been revealed” (Eph.3:5). He states that even the things which the eye has not seen, and the ear has not heard, and which has not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him (a favorite funeral text and passage used by those who insist we cannot know these things until we die and go to heaven) ...to us *God has revealed them through the Spirit...*” (I Cor 2:8-10). He then says, “the Spirit was given that we might know the things of God” (ver. 12). He states, “we have the mind of Christ” (ver.16). How can anyone who has the mind of Christ remain ignorant of His Word and will?

Why is it necessary for Christians to know and understand the Bible? Because not knowing and understanding can be fatal. Long ago God told Hosea the prophet: “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you...” (Hosea 4:6). Jesus said: “And this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). It is only by knowing God

(as revealed in the Bible) that we can have eternal life. We spend our energies reading books, visiting therapist, attending self help sessions, and attending seminars trying to acquire what is a by-product of knowing God.

To the Ephesians who had been “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (1:3), were “chosen to be blameless, were predestined to adoption (1:4,5), and had the Holy Spirit and a promise of inheritance” (1:10,14), Paul prays for them that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, which is in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenlies.” (ver. 14-18). To the Colossians he wrote: “we have not ceased to pray for you to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (ver. 9, 10). Paul’s prayer is that they might be *enlightened* and *know* and *have knowledge* of these things which will guide and enrich their lives. Does the church today need any less this enlightening and knowledge? And where shall they learn it if it is not taught in the Bible Colleges and Seminaries and not preached by the preachers? It appears that our culture has penetrated our seminaries and churches with skeptics in both the pulpit as well as the pew. Many who proclaim to be Christians doubt the absolute truthfulness of the Scriptures. Yet it is from within its pages we are schooled about the teachings and messages of Jesus and the Apostles which are to govern our daily lives and worship.

The Gentiles were condemned because they “refused to have God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28). This passage clearly shows what happens to a people, whether it is an individual, a church or a nation, that leaves God out of their reckoning. They bring judgment upon themselves when they give no place to the God revealed in Scripture. When God is banished from life, or is neglected they become a certain kind of person and in these verses following verse 28 is the most terrible description of the kind of person they become.

At the end of his earthly life, in the shadow of Gethsemane, Jesus is praying to the Father. He begins this prayer with this confession of faith: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). This statement expressively links salvation to a correct knowledge of the identity of the one true God and His son, Jesus Christ. Note the words: *The only true God!* This is not the “Triune” god given birth in the year 325 AD by 325 quarreling bishops and Constantine, the first “Christian” emperor, (who never ceased worshiping the sun god) in the council of Nicaea in which St. Augustine, a century later, developed into the doctrine of the Trinity. Nor is it the figment of Jewish imagination, which tried to worship God who had not revealed Himself in His son, and it is not the object of pagan worship, directed toward the

creature rather than the creator. And, we might add, it is not “the man upstairs,” a term used flippantly by unbelievers, usually when they are in trouble, but reverence to the Father who sent the son into the world. Of the Father, Jesus, who, when he was approached by a Jewish man who asked him which is the most importance of all the commandments, answered: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, *the Lord is one*” (Mark 12:29). It is only by *knowing* the “Only true God” that we can receive eternal life. II Thessalonians 1:7-9 warns: “Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to all those *who do not know* God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory his power.” It is only in knowing the Bible that we can know God and not having this knowledge will lead to rejection and destruction. Jesus expected his hearers to not only hear but understand. “He called the multitude and said to them ‘Hear and understand’.” (Matt. 15:10).

Some of the most controversial and argumentative passages in Scripture are the very ones the Apostle says he would “not have you ignorant about” or about which he asks “do you not know?” In I Corinthians 6 Paul asks the question “do you not know” six times. This infers that they should have known these things. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (ver. 2, 3). Why was it important that they know this? Not knowing these things was affecting their life as a church. They were going to law with one another before a worldly court. Paul states this was a shame and a defect in the church. Only when we know the Scriptures and live by them can we avoid entanglements with the world. “Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” (ver. 9). Paul lists those whom he calls “unrighteous”: “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetousness, drunkards, revilers and swindlers.” Sadly too many of these “unrighteous” people are not only a part of our churches, many are leaders. David Bercot stated it well in *The Kingdom That Turned The World Upside Down*: “Either a person’s heart is entirely devoted to God’s kingdom, or it is devoted to the kingdoms of this world. We can’t have a divided heart or serve two masters.” Evidently some of the Corinthians did not know this. The next three times Paul asks this question, it has to do with our physical bodies and immorality. “Do you not know your bodies are members of Christ?” (ver. 15); “Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her?” (ver. 16); “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own?” (ver. 19). Evidently some of the Corinthians, like many today, did not know the reality of the fact that our bodies are members of Christ and we are indwelt, in our physical bodies by the Holy Spirit, and this is to determine the course of our actions, not only concerning immorality but every facet of our lives. He stated this in II Corinthians 12:20, 21: “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputed, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.” When the church ignores the presence of the Holy Spirit in individual lives immorality and every evil sin flourishes.

The Apostle uses the term “do you not know?” two times in Romans 6 in answer to the question: “how shall we who died to sin live in it?” (ver. 2). He asks: “do you not know” then answers the question in verses 3-11. Because they did not know, they were advancing the idea that a Christian could continue sinning and the grace of God would take care of it. He then asks, “shall we continue in sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” and answers this question in verses 16-23. These passages show that it is important to know what the Scripture says about sin and grace.

I Thessalonians 4:13 states: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so you will not grieve as the rest who have no hope.” The King James version puts it this way: “I would not have you ignorant concerning them that are asleep...” Simply said we are not to be ignorant about those who have died. Yet due to emotionalism, sensational preaching, and prophecy experts this is one of the most misunderstood subjects of the Bible. In the first place, these emotional experts deny the Bible plainly teaches that death is “asleep” and, secondly, they discount the phrase “even so.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament states that these two little words, *even so*, “marks something added to what has already been said or that something already said holds good at another point of use.” This means that wherever in the Scriptures these two words, *even so*, are used they are referring to, and explaining, something said before. If *even so*, as Thayer explains “marks something that has already been said” then it is the fact that Jesus died and rose again. Just as Jesus rose again *even so*, that is, in the very same way, God will bring all those who are asleep in Jesus to life again just as He brought Jesus to life again. Let us repeat that: If *even so*, “marks something that has already been said” then it is the fact that Jesus died and rose again. Just as Jesus rose again *even so*, that is, in the very same way, God will bring all those who are asleep in Jesus to life again just as He brought Jesus to life again. We hope everyone gets it.

At this point we can paraphrase Paul’s statement in Romans 10:14, 15: “How shall they know if they do not hear and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Just how much is preached in our churches today concerning sin and grace? How much Scripture is actually taught in churches? Why are so many pulpits today filled with so many want-to-be-psychologists and entertainers? Why do most Christians and many preachers say we cannot know and understand the Bible? Perhaps if our Bible Colleges, Seminaries and preachers would major on the Bible and less on contemporary worship and church administration we would see a difference in the church’s knowledge and understanding of the Bible. We have quoted Stephen Prothero, author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know And Doesn’t* in two previous News Letters, and feel he should be heard again. He wrote: “U.S. citizens know almost nothing about the Bible. Although most regard it as the word of God, few read it anymore. Even evangelicals from the Bible Belt seem more focused on loving Jesus than on learning what he had to say. In a religious literacy quiz I have administered to undergraduates for the last two years, students tell me that Moses was blinded on the road to Damascus and Paul led the Israelites on their exodus out of Egypt. Surveys that are scientific have found that only one of three U.S. citizens is able to name the four Gospels, and one of ten think that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife.” No wonder America is said to be a nation of biblical illiterates.