

TRUTH

“. . . *Your word is truth*” (John 17:17)

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THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The intelligence of some people is incredible! Their knowledge of science, computers, finances, medicine, or other matters is nothing short of astounding. Regardless of a human’s IQ, however, no person’s knowledge can compare to the Creator’s.

We sometimes use the word “omniscient” to describe the Lord. “Omniscient” means all-knowing. The Bible plainly affirms that God “*knows all things*” (1 John 3:20). He knows everything about the past, the present, and the future.

How do humans acquire knowledge? We learn things when another person teaches us, we learn by observation, and we learn from personal experience. What about Jehovah? His knowledge has not been acquired from anyone or anything. His all-knowingness is part of His eternal nature — His current level of knowledge is the same as it always has been. Unlike people, the Lord’s knowledge can neither increase nor decrease.

Psalm 147 contains a fascinating and memorable message about God’s knowledge: “*Praise the LORD! . . . He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite*” (147:1,4,5). In this passage, what is affirmed or implied about the Lord’s knowledge? (1) He knows that the stars are limited in number; (2) He knows how many stars there are; (3) He knows the name of all the stars; (4) His understanding is infinite. Wow, just wow!

Jesus declared that the Father knows the number of hairs on our head and the falling of every sparrow (Matthew 10:29,30). It is another statement that Jesus made about God’s knowledge that really catches our attention: “*God knows your hearts*” (Luke 16:15). Are we listening?

God knows all those things which humans call “secrets”: “*For He knows the secrets of the heart*” (Psalm 44:21), and He will bring “*every secret thing*” into judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Folks who try to hide things from the Creator are wasting their time and effort, as “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him*” (Hebrews 4:13).

The Lord’s complete knowledge of our activities should produce a number of responses within us. First,

we should *stand in awe* of a Being whose knowledge knows no limits. Second, because He knows everything about what we think, say, and do, we should *take a serious approach* to life, knowing He holds us accountable for our choices. Also, as His children, *we are comforted* to know that when we are facing trials, struggles, and problems, He sees what we are facing and cares about our plight.

Would it be correct to assume that God has revealed in the Bible one hundred per cent of what He knows? No, that is an inaccurate assessment. Moses instructed the Israelites, “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children . . .*” (Deuteronomy 29:29). In these words, we see a contrast: a contrast between “secret things” and “revealed” matters.” The “secret things” would be those matters which the Lord has “kept to Himself,” that is, He has not told/revealed them to humanity [such as the name of each star (Psalm 147:4) or the daily diary of Noah’s activities from birth to death].

We already noted that that Jehovah has complete knowledge of the future. There is a great difference, though, in saying that He (1) *knows* something will happen and in saying that He (2) *wants* it to take place. His knowledge of the future (which, from the viewpoint of humans, is His “foreknowledge”) does not detract from or remove man’s free will to act as he chooses. Also, God’s knowledge that something is going to transpire does not cause it to happen. For instance, a person riding in a helicopter may see in advance that two automobiles traveling on a road below him are on a course which will cause them to collide. Yet, his pre-knowledge/observation is not what causes the accident to occur.

Via the prophet Isaiah, the Lord God predicted that Cyrus would be helpful in the rebuilding of the Jews’ temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28). That came to pass over one hundred years later (Ezra 1:1-4), but at no time did God control Cyrus’ free will, nor did He force Cyrus to act against his own desires.

God’s knowledge is on a level all its own! May we be humble enough to exalt, praise, and serve Him.

-- Roger D. Campbell

TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 3-4

When the enslaved Israelites cried out to the Lord, He heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with their ancestors (Exodus 2:23,24). The next two chapters record God's appearance to Moses, after which Moses "returned to the land of Egypt" (4:20). He was a man on a mission . . . God's mission!

3:1-5 – In the region of Horeb/Sinai, known as "the mountain of God" (3:1), God appeared to Moses from a bush which was burning, yet it was not destroyed. In this instance, the One who appeared to Moses is identified "the Angel of the LORD," "the LORD," and "God" (3:2,4). God called the ground where Moses was standing "holy" (3:5). When Deity labels something as "holy," we need to treat it with the highest respect. And, when Deity speaks, we need to be ready to listen.

3:6 – The Lord described Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Since the living Lord does not change (Malachi 3:6), the God whom Christians serve is the same God whom Moses and the three forefathers of the Israelites served. We live under a different covenant, but we serve the same Almighty Creator (Hebrews 1:1,2).

3:7-10 – God revealed His plan to deliver Israel from Egypt. God first said that He would be the Deliverer: "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians . . ." (3:8). He went on to tell Moses that he would play that role: ". . . I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (3:10). Conclusion: the Lord would do the delivering through Moses. In numerous instances, we read in the Bible that God does something, but when we analyze the entire scenario, we learn that God does it *through* someone or something. God gets the credit and the glory, even if He takes the action in an indirect manner.

3:11-14 – Moses was reluctant to take on the task of being the one to lead Israel out of Egypt and to the land of Canaan. In fact, he tried to convince the Lord that he was not the man for the job. Moses first wondered, "Who am I . . . ?" (3:11). God's answer: "I will certainly be with you . . ." (3:12).

Moses countered with the idea that the Israelites would want to know the name of the God Who sent him. He asked, "What shall I say to them?" (3:13). God's answer: tell them, "I AM has sent me to you" (3:14). "I AM" indicated that Jehovah is the self-existent, eternally-existent Being.

3:19-22 – God foretold that initially Pharaoh would not release the children of Israel, but at a later time he would let them go. We will see that prediction come true! What would the Lord do to change

Pharaoh's mind? "But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders . . . and after that he will let you go" (3:19,20). Ten powerful plagues would wear on the mighty monarch's heart!

4:1-9 – Two signs to convince Moses and the children of Israel – Moses was still not ready to agree to return to Egypt and be Israel's deliverer: "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you'" (4:1). Jehovah caused Moses' rod to become a serpent, then it turned back into a rod (4:2-4). What was the purpose of such action? In God's own words, "That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers . . . has appeared to you" (4:5).

A second sign followed: Moses' hand became leprous and then was restored to normal (4:6,7). If those two miracles did not convince the people that what Moses was telling them was true, God said a third sign would be available (water to blood, 4:9).

4:10-17 – Moses again tried to convince Jehovah that he was not well-suited for the job. What did Moses say? "I am not eloquent . . . but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10). God's answer: "Who has made man's mouth? . . . Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (4:11). If we are terrified at the thought of carrying out a God-given charge, let us recall His assurance that He will be with us as we strive to do His will (Matthew 28:19,20). God informed Moses that He would arrange for Aaron to go and serve as Moses' spokesman (4:14-16; 7:1). Moses, God is not looking for reluctant servants who try to hide behind excuses. He is looking for servants who are ready to step up and say, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

4:27-31 – After being apart for forty years, Aaron and Moses came together to go speak to the Israelites. They also would go before Pharaoh to relay God's charge and do miracles, but the first order of business was to approach the elders of Israel. What a great response the two brothers received from those men! "And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (4:30,31).

Things were moving in the right direction! God's leaders were in place, and the people were ready to follow. Yet, huge challenges lie ahead. Stay tuned.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Overcoming Anger/a Bad Temper

Most people would be surprised if they realized how many verses in the Bible discuss the emotion of anger. A rough count of the Old Testament and New Testament combined reveals over 450 times the idea of anger or wrath is mentioned. It can be easy for both lost people and Christians to categorize sins to ease their conscience. For instance, we might say that we would never commit murder. However, to lose your temper is not really a big deal.

God's word is clear that Christians must be careful with anger. "...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). "A quick-tempered man acts foolishly..." (Proverbs 14:17). "An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression" (Proverbs 29:22). These three passages (and so many more!) help us understand that there are many negative effects when we cannot control our anger.

The apostle Paul quoted the psalmist David, saying, "Be angry, and do not sin . . ." (Ephesians 4:26). This idea, coupled with the realization that even Jesus had moments of anger (Mark 3:5), helps us understand that this emotion is not sinful within itself. However, it is very dangerous and can lead to all manner of problems when we lose our self-control.

So, how can we overcome anger? One thing we can do is take a moment to consider our actions before we fall into sinful behavior. This is what James was saying in James 1:19,20. Being slow to wrath allows us to feel angry about something, but we try to control our emotions before we fall into sin. "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29).

A second thing is to take action quickly to resolve the issue causing the anger. Paul's encouragement is to not allow something to torment us for more than a day (Ephesians 4:26). Anger can lead to other sins when we allow it to remain at the forefront of our thoughts. It can often consume every part of our life.

A third action to help us overcome anger is to avoid others who have the same issue. "Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul" (Proverbs 22:24,25).

Overcoming anger can be very tough. It takes work and consistency to find the correct balance between being angry, but not sinning. Paul's encouragement to put off anger (Colossians 3:8) lets us know that a child of God should continually strive to overcome this strong emotion.

- Joel Danley

If I sin with my hand, does the Lord really expect me to cut it off?

Though they are not the slaves of sin, followers of Jesus do, from time to time, violate God's will (1 John 1:8; 2:1). In the process of sinful conduct, sometimes our hand or other body parts are involved.

The Lord Jesus said, "If your hand causes you to sin, but it off" (Mark 9:43). He said the same thing about our foot; and if our eye causes us to sin, He said to pluck it out (9:45,47). We know that the hand, foot, and eye are literal objects, but what about the cutting off and plucking out? Are those actions literal as well?

In the context of Mark 9:43-48, we see the Master pointing out two possible eternal destinies: (1) life/the kingdom of God and (2) hell (9:43,45,47). Rather than calling for His disciples to do harm to their bodies, Jesus' appeal was for to them to control themselves so they can enter into life eternal instead of Gehenna.

If we literally remove one hand, one foot, or one eye, what would still be possible if our other hand, foot, or eye was healthy? We could use that remaining hand, foot, or eye to commit sin. So, the key to avoiding sin is not reducing the number of body parts.

If we genuinely desire to please our Lord, whether it be carrying out action that He instructs us to take or avoiding things that He forbids us to do, the key in pleasing Him is our *heart*. Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil" (Luke 6:45). If we want to have *good* behavior and *good* speech, those come only from a *good* heart. An evil heart produces evil speech and evil conduct.

Again, the key is controlling the heart, as it controls the hand, foot, and eye. The wise words of Proverbs 4:23 still read, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." God's word teaches that efforts to punish our physical bodies are "of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Colossians 2:23). In the long term, such an approach to self-control is not effective.

When we look at that Mark 9:43-48 passage, we see the Christ emphasizing that hell is a place which we want to avoid at all costs. And, entering life (eternal) is worth whatever sacrifices or changes we need to make. Whatever is required to do what is right, we need to be ready to do it. Heaven will be worth it, and in eternity we will not have even the slightest regret about our decision to control ourselves, present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), and live faithfully for the living God.

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

Matthew 13 contains seven parables of Jesus, all pertaining to the kingdom of heaven (the church). The Parable of the Tares is recorded in Matthew 13:24-30. The disciples' request for an explanation of this parable and Jesus' answer are recorded in Matthew 13:36-43. What do we learn from this parable?

First, note the particulars of the parable from Matthew 13:24-30. A man sowed good seed (wheat) in his field, but an enemy sowed tares among them. As both seeds began to mature, it was evident that tares were growing among the wheat. The servants asked if they should pull up the tares but were told to wait, lest they uproot the wheat also. They were told to let both grow until harvest time, when the tares would be gathered up to be burned and the wheat kept.

Before looking at Jesus' explanation of the parable, it would be good to understand a little about tares. Tares so closely resemble wheat in appearance that the two cannot be distinguished until they have taken root and sprouted (13:26). By the time the tares are distinguishable from the wheat, uprooting them risks uprooting/damaging the wheat also (13:29).

Now consider Jesus' explanation of this parable from Matthew 13:37-43:

✓ **The owner of the field who sowed good seed is “the Son of Man” (37).** This term is used frequently of Jesus (Matthew 9:6; 16:13,27,28; etc.).

✓ **The enemy who sowed tares among the wheat is the devil (39).** The word “devil” means “slanderer” or “accuser.” He is also known as “Satan,” meaning “adversary.” Satan truly is the adversary of God and His people (1 Peter 5:8). Satan ever seeks to deceive the world (Revelation 12:9), striving to cause humans to be lost eternally. Note also that Satan works while men sleep (25); thus, Christians are told to stay awake and be watchful (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

✓ **The good seed (wheat) represents the children of the kingdom (38).** These are Christians, begotten by the seed of God's word (1 Peter 1:23; Luke 8:11). Good seed is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:16-20).

✓ **The tares represent children of the devil (38).** Just as the children of God are those who follow His will, the children of the devil are those who do his will (John 8:44). Again, the fruit of one's life demonstrates whether he is good or bad seed (Matthew 7:16-20).

✓ **The field is the world (38).** Both good and bad seeds were sown in the same field. Jesus is “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (Revelation 19:16) and “*the ruler over the kings of the earth*” (Revelation 1:5). The field belongs to Jesus, for, “*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein*” (Psalms 24:1; see also Matthew 28:18).

✓ **The harvest is the end of the world/time (39).** Jesus calls it “*the last day*” (John 6:39,40; 12:48; etc.). It is also a day of separation (40-43), with the wicked cast into a furnace of fire, while the righteous “*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father*” (43).

✓ **The reapers are God's angels (39).** Other New Testament passages also mention the involvement of angels in the second coming of Jesus (Matthew 13:49; 16:27; 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7).

Having considered the particulars of the parable and Jesus' explanation, what lessons can we learn?

✓ **There will always be good and bad on earth.** Until Jesus returns, this will be the case. The zealous workers in the parable sought to remove the tares before the harvest but were told to wait. However, as Jesus plainly teaches, the day is coming when there will be a separation; this includes eternal life for those who follow Jesus and eternal condemnation for those who stubbornly reject and disobey the Lord (compare Matthew 25:31-46).

✓ **God alone is the Judge.** Christians have no right to seek to remove evil via physical force or violence. God knows the tares from the wheat and will judge accordingly. Truly, the Judge of all the earth will judge righteously (Genesis 18:25)! But, this truth does not preclude church discipline, as some have wrongly concluded. Withdrawing from disorderly Christians is very clearly taught in other New Testament passages (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

✓ **Christians are to effect change via light.** We are to live in this world, yet not be conformed to it (Romans 12:1-2). God wants Christians to remove evil in this world by spreading the gospel, leading to reformed lives and new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Spiritual darkness is removed via spiritual light; this includes both Christians' example (Matthew 5:16) and “*the light of the gospel*” in general (2 Corinthians 4:4).

✓ **We reap what we sow.** Do not expect to reap good from sowing bad seed! Truly, “*God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life*” (Galatians 6:7,8).

Dear reader, life is short, and the “harvest” is coming. What kind of seed are you sowing?

-- Chad Dollahite

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