

Trusting What You Know

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word. (Ps 119:42)

At the heart of reasonable and rational trust is knowledge. You cannot trust what—or whom—you do not know. Much of today's "decisionism" salvation teaching demands that a sinner trust God before he knows God, a highly inconsistent point, not to mention an unbiblical idea. God makes Himself known to His people in regeneration (Jer 31:34; 2Ti 2:19; Joh 17:3, one of the most frequently misquoted and misinterpreted passages in the New Testament. Jesus did not say that "Knowing Christ is eternal life," the typical interpretation. He said that He gives eternal life to those whom the Father gave to Him, and that a primary purpose of this eternal life—which He gives—is to "...know thee...." Notice the simple word "that" in the verse; "*that* they might know thee." The typical interpretation actually reverses the true order of spiritual life and knowledge. You do not gain knowledge that you might gain life, but rather God gives you eternal life that you might know Him. We will spend some time on the Biblical truth of trusting Christ, but in this chapter we will examine David's trust in the word of God.

David's specific point in our study verse refers to his trust in God's word, not his trust in God. Ps 119 mentions God's "word" by mentioning various kindred terms in each of its 176 verses. It is an acrostic poem. The psalm is divided into sections, each titled by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, "Aleph," "Beth," etc. Each section contains eight verses, and in each section the first letter of each line begins with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Clearly the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of this psalm to enhance our trust in the Word of God, Scripture.

We live in an age of professing Christians who demonstrate amazing creativity in evading the message of Scripture rather than trusting it. Some will focus on a series of favorite passages and seldom, if ever, mention other passages that contradict their forced interpretation of their favorite verses. Others will cite given verses with a pretentious "That is not in the original Greek," in most cases having little or no knowledge whatever of New Testament Greek language, much less of the manuscript history relating to that passage. For example, if you discuss the doctrine of the Trinity with a Jehovah's Witness and mention 1Jo 5:7, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one," the Jehovah's Witness, if well rehearsed in their teachings will promptly respond that this verse "is not in the original Greek" manuscripts, or at least in the earliest ones. Sadly, most textual advocates of Scripture today have surrendered this verse to hostile attacks. Look it up in a modern translation. Either the translators will simply omit it or include it with a footnote that references its lack of early textual support. In his commentary on this verse John Gill addresses these questions and provides ample historical evidence in support of the verse.

"...[I]t is cited by many of them; by Fulgentius, in the beginning of the "sixth" century, against the Arians, without any scruple or hesitation; and Jerom, as before observed, has it in his translation made in the latter end of the "fourth" century; and it is cited by Athanasius about the year 350; and before him by Cyprian, in the middle, of the "third" century, about the year 250; and is referred to by Tertullian about, the year 200; and which was within a "hundred" years, or little more, of the writing of the epistle; which may be enough to satisfy anyone of the genuineness of this passage; and besides, there never was any dispute about it till Erasmus left it out in the, first edition of his translation of the New Testament; and yet he himself, upon the credit of the old British copy before mentioned, put it into another edition of his translation."

Gill trusted God's word more than its critics. Modern textual scholars would improve their credibility by following Gill's example. Often Bible teachers will chase words all over the Bible to make their

favorite case for their private ideas from a single word or set of words, while repeatedly ignoring the context of every passage that they cite, another favorite strategy of folks who distrust the word of God. As an example, listen to the typical lesson of our day on the word world as used in Joh 3:16. How many of these teachers bother to tell their audience that the Greek word translated “world” in this passage has at least eight different meanings? How many of them interact with these various meanings to find the most appropriate meaning in the greater context of Joh 3? How many of them research the way that the word was actually used in first century culture, especially the Jewish culture in which the author wrote these words? They go to the passage with a preconception regarding the death of Christ and the way of salvation and make their case with no trust for God’s word to form their ideas and to lead them to God’s truth.

“So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me.” How do you respond to someone who challenges your Christian faith? Far too many Christians today are able to offer little more than a sentimental response to their critics with such empty words as “I can’t answer your question, but I know whom I have believed.” You say you know whom you have believed, but if you know Him, why do you exhibit ignorance of His personally inspired writings to you? The only way any believer can intelligently—and spiritually—respond to the reproaching critic or the inquiring mind is by an intense study of Scripture, not a casual devotional chapter a day reading. *Study* is the operative word here. We readily grasp the intent of study in the classroom, whether we are the teacher or the student. Our educational system has developed multiple teaching tools and study methods that enhance one’s working memory of important written material. Yet, sadly often, we park our minds and plunge mindlessly—and thoughtlessly—into our Scripture reading with no reflective engagement whatever of its teachings for us and for those who look to us for answers to their spiritual needs and questions. A Christian radio program that focuses on apologetics, The Bible Answer Man, founded by the late Walter Martin, used to end most programs with the challenge, “Are you willing to do for the truth what the cults do for error?”

A thinking Christian should never engage anyone without prayerful and studious preparation. As much as possible, become acquainted with this person’s worldview. Avoid having to think on the fly or react spontaneously to whatever they might say. “Be prepared” is a Biblical mandate (1Pe 3:15), not an “unspiritual” idea. Once you know this person’s mindset, study not only your strong verses to counter their ideas, but study their favorite verses and develop sound counter-arguments and interpretations that are more sound and Biblical than their view. Find words and forms of reasoning to present to them from their own favorite verses that support your—and hopefully, a more Biblical—view of the lesson. When you set up the person’s ideas, avoid the sadly common “straw man” tactic of misrepresenting his/her views in a highly unfavorable light, and then attacking the false view. Articulate their views so correctly that they will congratulate you and appreciate the fact that you fairly know and describe their ideas. Then you should be prepared to offer them a better way of viewing Scripture and God than they now embrace.

David’s response to those who reproached him was to grow out of his knowledge of the word of God, a word that he knew intimately and trusted without reservation.

In confronting and interacting with those who teach error we should prepare as fully in terms of a gracious and Christian attitude as with a solid base of knowledge from Scripture. Often disciples of false teaching will argue their own Scriptural logic till they realize that they are not on the solid ground that they presumed. Rather than graciously considering your interpretation, they will react to you with vicious hostility. A reaction in kind will not help your case for Biblical truth. Regardless of the attitude from the other person, we are commanded to be gracious and truly “Christian” in our attitude (2Ti 2:24-26). Paul inserts a “must” into this lesson, leaving us with no legitimate option other than the gracious instruction of the passage. Our divine assignment is to win people, not arguments. We

accomplish this noble assignment by our attitudes no less than by sound and informed Biblical reasoning.

How fully do we trust God's word? Enough to resign our personal ideas, perhaps even some of our personal conduct and habits, to live closer to it? Enough to allow it to rule over us rather than trying to force it to fit our preferences? Do we attempt to correct Scripture, or do we allow Scripture to correct us?

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