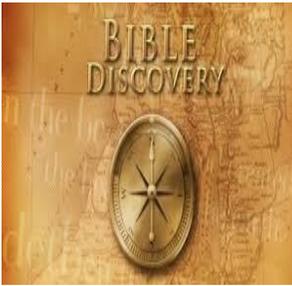


## *Zeal's Testimony Tempered by Knowledge*



*Confusion, division, disagreement* – all abound in religion today. People have divided into hundreds of different denominations, worshipping in different ways, teaching different doctrines. Some insist disagreement exists because God never told us everything we need to know; or that truth has been lost or changed over the centuries. Yet consider Paul's encouragement to Timothy, *"how from infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."* And Paul's encouragement to

all who seek the Word of the Lord telling us, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* [2 Timothy 3:15-17] – No, contrary to what some may say, God has shown us everything we need to know, first to be saved in His Son Jesus; and then to provide us assurance that the Scriptures are from and of God being all we need therefore for us to live by.

So why is it some people think the average person can't understand the Scriptures? Yet again we can turn to Scripture where at Acts 17:11 we read *"The (Bereans) received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true"* – we see that the Scriptures give the average Joe like you and me a way to distinguish truth from error. Rather than a cartoon which suggests finding a friend named Gideon and telling him as the quote suggests, ***"Good thing I found you Gideon, it seems someone has been hiding all your bibles in hotel rooms"***; but rather – *we read it!*

Rather than relying on others to tell us what the Bible says, *let us always plug in to God's Word* and discover for ourselves what it says. God reveals Himself through the Bible to make known His will. If we can't understand the message, if we'll not know His message, then it would seem God has failed. But how can an all-wise, all-powerful God fail? *God cannot fail* – He is all knowing, He is without fault or failure, He is the creator, we are the created; therefore we *can* understand or we fail ourselves.



If then we're to understand God's Word living a life of testimony tempered by knowledge of our Lord, we must not live with a lack of knowledge. God has addressed this issue again and again in His Word, for example...

- Hosea 4:6 – *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."*
- Matthew 22:29 – *"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."*
- And in our reading today, at Romans 10:2-3 - The Israelites were *"zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge."*

**Let's consider the many circumstances which demonstrate a lack of knowledge through 3 key categories.**

### **1. Some never have opportunity to learn the truth.**

This was the case of Cornelius [Acts 10:1-11:18] and the Ethiopian treasurer [Acts 8:26-39]. Such people need to hear words whereby they can be saved [Acts 11:14]. In most cases,

however, God sends His people (that's *us*) to tell others the Good News about the truth of what Jesus has done for them. That is why He says, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.*" [Romans 10:15b] What joy there is for the Cornelius', the Ethiopian treasurers, the mothers and fathers, the children, the sick and the forlorn, indeed for all who receive the opportunity through people like you and me who know the Saviour and love others enough to go tell them about Jesus.

## 2. **Some don't study the Bible diligently.**

Sadly, many squander opportunities they have to know God's will either by never opening His Word (*A book tight shut is but a block of wood!*); or selectively choosing scriptures they learn. Many will look up and follow scripture in isolation which seems to support their viewpoint rather than search out the will of God. For instance, there was the man who stuck his finger in his Bible seeking God's will for his life and read Matthew 27:5, "*Then he went away and hanged himself.*" Not being certain of God's will in this verse, he then again reopened his Bible and stuck his finger in where it opened reading Luke 10:37, "*Go and do likewise.*" We may laugh but there are Christians today living the roller coaster life arising from such practices. To truly understand, we must have our senses exercised through constant use so that as Hebrews 5:12-14 teaches rather than "*living on milk*", we can enjoy the "*solid food of the mature*" and "*Can distinguish good from evil*". We must "*search the Scriptures daily*" - Acts 17:11. Much religious error & division result from lack of study.

## 3. **Some people don't handle the Bible properly.**

Even if a person studies and quotes the Bible, he may not be using it properly. Paul instructs at 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one...who correctly handles the word of truth.*" For example the devil tempted Jesus using scripture but used it out of context and to his own end [Matthew 4:5-7]. Again, some try to prove *their* practices by finding scriptures which seem to support their behaviour – particularly from the Old Testament - rather than aligning their lives with God's Word, without realizing Christ's fulfillment of the old so that we live through Christ and not the law. No Old Testament writer conceived of anyone being saved by their works – they intended to show us to the One who would save us having demonstrated our need for salvation so that through His grace we might be counted as righteous. Salvation in the Old Testament, as in the New, was always by faith. In fact Paul tells us that we "*also died to the law through the body of Christ*" [Romans 7:4] which is good news for we cannot measure up except through grace. We look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

**Demonstrate great zeal for God, yet testimony reveals little knowledge of God.**

In each of these instances, those who follow such practices demonstrate great zeal for God yet their testimony reveals little knowledge of God; just as Paul records many were doing in His day, "*but their zeal was not based on knowledge since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own.*" [Vs. 2-3]

Such people never understand God's plan to restore this world, disfigured by sin and death, reaches its climax with the resurrection of Jesus. When the King enters, all the prophecies, all the hopes, all the longings find in Him their true fulfillment. There may have been earlier victories; but these are only signposts along the way. The goal has been the restoration of people to a holy God. With Jesus, we find the only perfect One with right-standing before God. He comes having blazed a path defined by God's perfection, rather than by our own sense of right and wrong. All men, women, & children who commit their lives to Him are made right with God & begin new lives defined by faith within God's new covenant which was made in His Son, Jesus our Lord.

What Paul is saying, and it bears consideration in our lives as well, in essence is being religious is not the same as being righteous. All who are zealous in their testimony without knowledge of the One to whom they are zealous may have great religiosity yet be suffering failure concerning righteousness. The Jew's zeal, in their minds, was a zeal for God. Paul knew this from his own experience. Yet Israel's zeal was a misinformed, ignorant zeal. Paul tells us they were ignorant concerning God's righteousness. Israel had first-hand experience with God and His righteousness. Israel had the Law, which was the revelation of His righteousness. Most recently Israel had witnessed the righteousness of God in the person of Jesus Christ. No people had more revelation concerning the righteousness of God. How could they possibly be ignorant of His righteousness?

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Paul provides the explanation: Israel's problem was the same as is common to man - self-righteousness! Self-righteousness blinds men to God's righteousness. Israel didn't want to receive righteousness as a gift of grace; she wanted to earn it as the wages of her own good works. In seeking to establish her own righteousness, Israel refused to submit to the righteousness of God as revealed and offered in Jesus Christ. Fallen man has always sought to be saved by his works. When mankind strives to be saved by their own works, they do so in disobedience to the Word of God—not in ignorance of it. Like Israel, those who wish to stand on their own merits *choose not to* submit themselves to the righteousness God provides. Like Israel, they fail to grasp, "*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" [vs. 5].

Christ is the end, the culmination, or fulfillment, of the Law, given by God as a revelation of His righteousness, as His standard for righteousness, showing all men to be sinners; the Law bearing witness to the righteousness of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The Law defining sin so we might recognize it as such, and recognize our need for salvation. The Christian loves that which the Law requires and desires to do what the Law says because the Christian loves Christ. Our failure to live up to the standards of the Law demonstrates the weakness of our own flesh and the evil of sin. Praise God that in grace, the Law's requirements are met by those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Saviour; those who walk in the Spirit. Therefore those who love one another also fulfill the Law.

Paul's conclusion is clear. We must ask if like the Jews we've failed to attain righteousness not because we did not know but because we do not agree with what we know. Conversely, we must check our hearts acknowledging we, as the Gentiles of the first generation church, have attained righteousness without first having known the truth. What's the difference? The difference is between faith and works.

The Jews tried earning righteousness by law-keeping in their own interpretations; the Gentiles attained righteousness as a gift, by faith in Jesus as their Messiah only understanding the Law after knowing Christ. We're saved by believing in Jesus, not by behaving good enough to earn God's approval.

The question then is "have we been saved by faith"? Have we accepted God's wonderful gift of grace through His Son, Jesus Christ who died on the cross saving us from our sins, rose from the grave demonstrating He has conquered sin, and prepared a place for us with our Heavenly Father? Have we chosen the law or grace for our journey – that is the question!

