



Searching Out the Matter

Spiritual Exercise

It is impossible to love someone you do not know. It is no coincidence that our primary desire toward God – eternal life – is to know Him (and His Son) in the most intimate way possible:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3

The Greek word that is translated “know” in this verse is used to describe the deepest relationship between two people.

Know (*ginōskō*): learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of, perceive, feel; to become known; Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.

Outline of Biblical Usage, BlueLetterBible.org

The normal Christian life – the normal human life – is a life of growing in our knowledge of God. Oh, how awesome it is to know from the start that the One who has identified Himself as the Truth is encouraging us to an intimate relationship with Himself, and with our Father in Heaven!

As we begin this adventure together, let us commit ourselves to be motivated, sustained and completed by the chief desire of God’s heart for us – that we would love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). Let us commit ourselves to fight for what has been given (and stolen away) – to know God that we might love Him more.

Prayer

Dear Father, it is our heart’s desire to love You, Your Son and the Holy Spirit more than we ever have before. As we begin this adventure, we commit ourselves to pursue You and Your Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Please Father, give us the grace to surrender, to be courageous, and to persevere through all that stands between each of us and the Three Persons who are the Trinity of God. Give us eyes to see, and ears to hear. In Christ’s name; Amen.

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Introduction

The availability of Christian resources in America is astounding. I dare say something has been written or recorded about every circumstance and situation that challenges every man, woman and child in this country. I don't know how CBD keeps up with all the books, tapes and study guides. There must be thousands of TV stations, and tens-of-thousands of radio stations dedicated to the followers of Jesus Christ. Who can count the number of websites that are dedicated to the application of God's word?

Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32) So why is the church in America so bound up? Why has she become as captive as the world in some of the most obvious sin – abortion, divorce, pride, greed, etc., etc.?

Speaking from personal experience, it is the lack of desire to know Him that has left us prisoners to the deception of Satan, the world and our flesh. Our enemies know that knowledge is power; and that this is particularly true in the Kingdom of God. They will fight us tooth and nail to keep the knowledge of God hidden from His children and the world.

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you." Matthew 24:4

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless. James 1:26

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Revelation 12:9

This adventure is not for the passive, or faint of heart. We must fight for the truth that will make us free. Praise God, we have been given weapons for the battle.

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2Corinthians 10:4-6

In the weeks ahead, we will find many weapons for our warfare. Let us desire to use them!!

Definition

Truth (*aletheia*): Objectively, signifying "the reality lying at the basis of an appearance; the manifested, veritable essence of a matter" (Romans 9:1; 2Corinthians 11:10). Used especially of Christian doctrine, for example in Galatians 2:5 where "the truth of the Gospel" denotes the "true" teaching of the Gospel, in contrast to perversions of it. The word has an absolute force in John 14:6; 17:17; 18:37, 38. In Ephesians 4:21, where the RV, "even as truth is in Jesus," gives the correct rendering, the meaning is not merely ethical "truth," but "truth" in all its fullness and scope, as embodied in Him. He was the perfect expression of the truth; this is virtually equivalent to His statement in John 14:6. *Vine's Expository Dictionary*

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Scripture

(All but those noted are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.* Proverbs 25:2

¹ Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 1Corinthians 4:1-2

¹¹ And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, ¹² so that
' *Seeing they may see and not perceive,
And hearing they may hear and not understand;
Lest they should turn,
And their sins be forgiven them.*" Mark 4:11-12

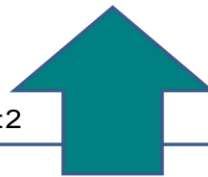
⁹ Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. 2John 1:9-11

The Mystery of God

And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God...
Mark 4:11

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
1Corinthians 4:1

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.
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The Doctrine of Man

Searching Out the Matter

It is responsible – for ourselves, our families, and everyone in our sphere of influence – to carefully avoid the deception of false doctrine (i.e., leaving the safety of the Master's property). Yet, the purpose of our stewardship is too amazing and critical to ignore:

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⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Ephesians 3:8-12

However, the children of God are privileged, invited and commanded to be stewards of the mysteries of God. A good steward does not limit his understanding to a portion of the Master's property. He seeks out what is good and profitable in it. God has invited us to seek out His mysteries.

There are "property lines" that we must be careful not to cross. But there is much to explore, if we are to be good stewards. So, how do we adventure out responsibly? We can trust God to protect us from wandering off the property if:

1. Our hearts are pure and rightly motivated.
2. We recognize that we have been wrong before, and might be wrong again.
3. We look to the Spirit and Christ Jesus to be our teacher.
4. Our hearts are bent toward unity – not dismissing someone even when we know they are wrong.

This is how we will search out the matters of God in the coming weeks. I can assure you that these are true for me and the adventure in which we are about to embark. In particular, I want to encourage you that I have both respect for, and caution toward, doctrine.

The "And" of Searching in Community

[The story of eating My flesh and drinking My Blood; contrasted with the "B" word.]

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:1-4

⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. John 6:53-56

³ For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another... ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Romans 12:3-5, 10, 16-18

Searching Out the Matter (continued)

Does God Still Speak Today?

Most of us know that famous verse:

So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Romans 10:17

The Greek word here is *rhema*: that which is spoken, what is uttered in speech or writing; in the singular, a word; in the plural, speech, or discourse.

I once heard a story about two pastors sitting on a plane. Both had been called into the ministry and were greatly used of God. In fact, they were both headed to a conference on evangelism. At some point in their conversation, they came to a disagreement. Pastor Number One had a strong conviction that God's last words to the church were found in the Canon of Scripture. Pastor Number Two asked him, "Then how did you get your calling?" Pastor Number One didn't speak for the rest of the flight.

This explains why a portion of Scripture can mean the same thing though we read it many times, until one day it takes on a deeper meaning to us. This is the Holy Spirit uttering a word that we are enabled to hear. It is in this hearing that faith comes.

Why is this important? As we will learn in a couple of weeks, this adventure includes the building of our faith. If God intends to bring faith via a word (or words), we must position ourselves to receive that word as He brings it.

God, in His grace, accommodates our nature in His speaking to us. Some hear from reading, others in prayer, conversation and circumstance. God will stretch us to hear in more than one area, but He speaks most predominately in the way that will make the truth clear.

No way is better or snazzier than another. And whatever way God speaks, we trust that the word (*rhema*) will not conflict with the written word (*logos*).

Knowing and Receiving the Truth

T. Austin-Sparks said, "Let us all pray every day that we shall not only hear the Scriptures expounded, but that a great act of God shall be done in us whereby our spiritual eyes are opened to see and know the Lord." Isn't that what we all want?

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

The truth is described as a double edged sword. It cuts bone from marrow, soul from spirit, etc. It is heavy; and sometimes just plain difficult to receive – to make it a part of our life. But, the good news is that it doesn't have to be. The Holy Spirit has laid out for us the keys for receiving the truth. In this day, it is important that we understand these keys, and teach them to our children.

Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6

The first key is hunger and thirst. The natural mind would say, "Blessed are the righteous." But it is those who are hungry and thirsty that are blessed. Righteousness comes – and the truth with it – when we recognize our emptiness and respond out of a deep need. As we prepare to read, or hear, the Scriptures, let us confess our need and proclaim our desire to know the Lord.

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The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10

In this verse, we find both a warning and the second key for entering in – “the love of the truth”. This verse is taken out of Paul’s exhortation regarding the Great Apostasy. Those without a love of the truth are at great risk of falling away from the faith. The key is that the love of the truth is something given (not earned); and it must be received.

If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. John 7:17 (NASB)

It is important that we are willing to respond in obedience to whatever the Lord reveals to us when the Scriptures are read or expounded – that we proclaim a preceding, “Amen.”

“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.” Luke 11:52

And when the truth comes, we must respond without hesitation – entering in. Otherwise, we risk losing it.

The Truth about Our Heart

For many, an effort is required to avoid depending solely on the mind when receiving the truth. We want to keep it a matter of the head, because this is how we are taught – to use our heads and distrust our hearts. Many of us have gotten stuck on the teaching that the heart is corrupt and deceitful. But scripture tells us differently.

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man
And makes flesh his strength,
Whose heart departs from the LORD.

⁶ For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,
And shall not see when good comes,
But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,
In a salt land *which is* not inhabited.

⁷“Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the LORD,
And whose hope is the LORD.

⁸ For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters,
Which spreads out its roots by the river,
And will not fear when heat comes;
But its leaf will be green,
And will not be anxious in the year of drought,
Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

⁹“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?

¹⁰ I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Searching Out the Matter (continued)

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19

² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart.

2Corinthians 2:2-3

I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law *is* within my heart.

Psalms 40:8

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:10

John Eldredge puts it this way:

It's undeniable: the new covenant, accomplished through the work of Christ, means that we have new hearts. Our hearts are good. Or God's a liar. Until we embrace that stunning truth, we will find it really hard to make decisions, because we can't trust what our hearts are saying. We'll have to be motivated by external pressure since we can't be motivated by our hearts. In fact, we won't find our calling, our place in God's kingdom, because that is written on our hearts' desires. We'll have a really hard time hearing God's voice in a deeply intimate way, because God speaks to us in our hearts. We'll live under guilt and shame for all sorts of evil thoughts and desires that the Enemy has convinced us were ours. God will seem aloof. Worship and prayer will feel like chores. Of course, I just described the life most Christians feel doomed to live. (*Wild at Heart*)

Jesus himself teaches that the heart can be good and even noble. That somebody is you, if you are his. God kept his promise. Our hearts have been circumcised to God. We have new hearts. Do you know what this means? Your heart is good. Let that sink in for a moment. Your heart is *good*.

Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.

Luke 6:44-45

Later, explaining the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus says, "The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

Luke 8:15

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

Matthew 12:33-35

Each person knows that now his *body* is the temple of God:

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"

1Corinthians 3:16

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

1Corinthians 6:19

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Okay— each of us is now the temple of God. So where, then, is the Holy of Holies?

It is in your heart.

Leaders in the Church have been taught, trained and disciplined to use their minds. Nothing inherently wrong here – the mind is a significant blessing. However, the mind has been raised to a level of supremacy that was not intended. We have been led to believe that everything can, and must, be understood. This philosophy has defended itself vigorously, even destroying the reputation of its key competitor – the heart.

So what does Scripture say about the mind:

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:1-2

In closing, I want to say that there is nothing in this to suggest a blind acceptance of someone's "truth". What I am proposing is a relationship with the Truth – a relationship that allows the truth to be heard with full assurance.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. John 14:6

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." ³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* You say, 'You will be made free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. ³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. John 8:31-35

Searching Out the Matter (continued)

Assignment

1. Review your notes and the Scripture passages from this week's module. What were the most challenging concepts about the truth of God? What do you think the Holy Spirit is trying to teach you in this regard?
2. Identify a passage of Scripture that you have had trouble understanding with your mind. In a setting with 2 or 3 other Christians, ask each in the group to share what it means to them. You may have to explain the "and" principle of searching out the matter.
3. Ask the Lord for the grace to practice the steps of knowing and receiving the truth:
 - a. A hunger and thirst for righteousness.
 - b. A love of the truth.
 - c. Courage and discipline to come with your "Amen" first, and to enter into the truth you are given.
4. Pray Paul's prayer to the Ephesians (1:15-23) over yourself. It might go something like this:

Heavenly Father, thank You for encouraging me to come to You as a child. God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, I pray that You would give me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. May the eyes of my understanding be enlightened; that I may know what is the hope of Your calling on my life, what are the riches of the glory of Your inheritance in me, and what is the exceeding greatness of Your power toward me. I pray in according to the working of Your mighty power – the same power You worked in Christ when You raised Him from the dead and seated Him at Your right hand. In Jesus' name. Amen.