

The Spirit And The Way

Knowledge or Conduct?

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I had a short but very interesting e-mail exchange with David Wyatt-Mair in South Africa this past week. He had sent me a YouTube video link to a channel that featured most or all of the video production made by the Worldwide Church of God during Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's later years. I do not know if all *The World Tomorrow*'s telecasts were there, but there were many—I would say dozens—that were on this particular channel, along with all the feast films that were produced, with all the Young Ambassador and Ambassador Choir productions that had been produced. And, some of them had been taken out of the feast films, and had been put into their own little particular video clips.

I did not take a whole lot of time, but watching some of them was a nice nostalgic trip down memory lane. Those things are slowly receding in the rear view mirror—actually quickly receding. These things are getting to be 25 to 30 years ago! It was neat to see the hair and clothing styles. It was enjoyable to reminisce a little bit about those times, and see all the things that the Worldwide Church of God was able to produce in those days, and to hear and see Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong preach again—to hear his voice, while watching his jowls quiver a bit while yelling at us for something. It was really neat to see.

But, as I sat there and thought about things for a few moments, my conclusion or estimation is that we have come a long ways since then. Most of us have learned a great deal since that time. We have been building on the foundation that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong laid.

Through the revelation of God opening our minds to His ways of looking at these things in slightly different angles, I think we have broadened and deepened what we know and understand about God, His plan, and His way of life over these last 25 years or so.

We may not have the resources that the Worldwide Church of God had at that time. They had a lot of money to work with. And, you will have a lot of money when you have over 120,000 or 130,000 people coming to the feast each year as well as probably that many or more co-workers out there, with the many millions watching *The World Tomorrow* telecast, and with 8 million addresses receiving *The Plain Truth* magazine. So, they had a lot of money coming in.

They had the huge, state-of-the-art facilities there in Pasadena, California. They had lots of contacts in the world. Mr. Armstrong specifically moved to Pasadena just so he would have access to the production facilities in Hollywood. They are known the world over for being able to produce media.

There were a lot of talented people in the Worldwide Church of God. They had talent coming out of their ears. People who looked good, could sing well, could dance or perform, and even preach a good sermon! All those things, along with all the people behind the scenes doing all the work took a lot of skill.

And they had a lot of people—the large numbers of people that they could draw from made what Mr. Armstrong was able to do in the work that God gave him big, grandiose, and spectacular in some respects.

But even though we do not have all these resources, we have done a work! Unlike some of the splinter groups, we have not tried to reproduce the work of Herbert W. Armstrong. As a matter of fact, I will be quite frank too, I believe that after all is said and done, the work that he did in preaching the gospel was wonderful, but the manner had some problems, especially in the area that we have concentrated on—feeding the flock of God.

We have moved on from the preaching the gospel in Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's manner, endeavoring to help the Bride of Christ prepare for the Kingdom of God. That is where we have focused all of our attention.

We, over these past years have put out a great deal of material all on the internet as a resource for God's people. It does not matter if you associate directly with the Church of the Great God or not—you do not have to be in any of the churches of God to have access to everything we have produced

since 1992 and some things that were produced before then, even. These materials can be utilized for one to grow in knowledge and understanding and Godly character.

Now, I asked David Wyatt-Mair a rhetorical question: What would Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong think of our little work?

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong would probably say that we were not doing enough to preach the gospel, because he was kind of like Paul, “Woe if I do not preach the gospel!” And so, he thought he had to be doing that 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Of course, a lot of people who have come out of the Worldwide Church of God have said that to our faces—that we are not doing enough to preach the gospel.

But we are preaching the gospel. We are just not doing it in the way that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong did it. It is a different approach to do the same thing. And I think it would not take very much to convince Mr. Armstrong of that, because he wanted the ministry to teach from the foundation that he had laid, and then to expand on these things that he had given us, so that he could concentrate on preaching the gospel. So, we are actually doing, later, the things that he wanted the ministry to do when he was alive.

So, we are getting the gospel of Jesus Christ out to people in this world. We do that through the daily production of *The Berean*. It goes into people’s e-mail boxes—about 91,000 people a day, every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year (at the time of this sermon). This is significant. They get a little slice of God’s word and some comment every day. And over 50,000 receive *The Forerunner* every time it goes out. And, most of them read it online. We only actually print out about 1500 or less the paper copies. But, 49,000 receive it in their inboxes.

So, we are not failing to preach the gospel. That is a lie if anybody tries to tell you that. You can tell that to their faces, too. I believe that would be a good thing to do, because they need to know that it is a lie. We are preaching the gospel. We are just going about it in a different manner. We are simply going about it in a way that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong could never had envisioned! He never thought of the internet. (That was Al Gore’s job!) Mr.

Armstrong never knew how this could be used in preaching the gospel. And, we have been able to latch on to it, and use it in a very effective way, I feel.

Unfortunately, some of our brethren in the other churches of God will not admit this, even though they themselves are finally doing the same sorts of things we are doing after they saw how well it was working for us.

The point remains—the point I am getting to—that we have, very frankly, moved far beyond what Mr. Armstrong taught. It has not been new truth. I do not believe that there has been much “new truth” discovered, because Mr. Armstrong laid the foundation, and he laid it well for all of us. A lot of the things that we have done that are somewhat different are taking what he gave us, and understanding it more deeply, only changing some of the details because it fit the Bible a bit better.

We still keep Pentecost, and count it the same way, except when Passover occurs on the Sabbath. And then there has to be a correction because we want to be keep it right according to the scriptures telling us to count, then we have to do it that way every time. And so, that is the change. We still count to Pentecost. We still count the same way. And we count it exactly the same way every year. God wants us to be consistent. He would not want us to mix the symbolism of wave-sheaf day and the first day of Unleavened Bread. He would want us to always go by His word. And so we have. It is not a change at all in what Mr. Armstrong did, necessarily, but we actually doing what he taught us.

This is the sort of things we have done.

So, he gave us the foundation on which to build, and we have built on it. We have not, like some others, been too afraid to probe the frontiers of understanding and pursue those studies to wherever they might lead. That is what God would want us to do. “Look! Here is the path, I have given you this much, now take it and go on from there, and understand it more deeply.” This is what we have tried to do.

Sometimes they have not fully squared with what we learned in the Worldwide Church of God, but we have always strictly followed the principle of letting the Bible interpret the Bible. And so we stand by what we have learned because we can go into scripture and prove it.

Now, because of this, because the Church of the Great God has gone into these things in such depth, some of us possess not just college level biblical knowledge, but perhaps graduate or even doctorate level knowledge—not on the full Bible by any means—none of us knows it well enough—but on certain subjects, we have a depth of knowledge that people in the past would have loved to have.

We have investigated such subjects as God's Sovereignty, God's Providence, Law and Grace, the Hebrew Calendar, Passover, the counting to Pentecost, Government, Marriage, Prayer, Sacrifice, of course The Ten Commandments, the Fruit of the Spirit, What the Holy Spirit is. There have been many sermons about how we believe that the doctrine of the trinity is false, and what the Holy Spirit is really doing, and the meanings of the holy days.

I look in my files at all sermons I have had to give over the years regarding the holy days, because I always give the morning sermon on the holy days, and it has been a good education for me. Usually what happens is I give the sermon that is most related to the day, while my dad gives whatever he has been working on in the past and relates that to the day. But, I am the one who normally looks at the meaning of the day in depth.

Continuing on, of course, we have also gone through things like that long series of sermons on Unity. Then, there are the various books of the Bible that we have delved into very deeply such as Amos, Matthew, John, The Acts, Hebrews, and now Ecclesiastes. There have been others, too.

Considering what we have covered over the years, and have gone back to in many cases, because we do have access to all of it on the internet—reading and rereading or listening again to these subjects—we have learned a lot!

I am not trying to blow a trumpet, saying, “Yeah! Look where we are!” That is not my purpose or intention at all. I just want to do a modest retrospective about what we have learned—just in this introduction. I am not going to keep on doing this. But, I want us to really think about how much knowledge we have been given. And, it has been given, and it’s been given, and it’s been gone over, and it’s been reviewed, and it’s been gone back to, and we always have it there for our understanding, learning, and re-learning if we need it.

So, that is my point. We have learned a lot. And it has not just been in the Church of the Great God, but it has been in the other churches of God as well. And, we have been in the church a long time, most of us—decades? Some have been for a generation or more! That is a lot of learning; a lot of knowledge and understanding. It is a wonderful thing! It is good to know. It is good to have a depth like a well of knowledge to draw from.

It is a fine thing—if it is used!

Knowledge that is only gathered, and not put into practice becomes vanity. It can become self-righteousness. “I know this, and you do not!” We can get a big head thinking that we know more, and therefore we are better than others, because we have greater knowledge, and therefore we are more spiritual than other people. But, this is a lie! Unless that knowledge is put into practice, we are not more spiritual than some scholar writing a commentary. Really, if all we want to do is gather knowledge, we would be gnostic, because that is all they wanted to do. They just wanted to know, and they felt that the more knowledge they had, the better it would be for them. This is essentially what gnosticism is. And then, they got into the weird stuff, too, that stuck onto them. That is not good. We do not want to be Gnostics.

So, I am not accusing anybody—do not take it that way. I am pointing it out how much we know and how much we have been taught. But, I am asking through this sermon on this Feast of Pentecost that we consider, “Are we putting the knowledge that we have learned into practice? Are we using what we know?”

Now, I know that we cannot use all that we know, and a lot of times use lags behind knowledge by some period of time. Some people are able to put knowledge into practice more quickly than others. Some people have to ruminate over things a while, like the cow under the tree, and chew on it before it becomes processed to the point where they can start using it in their lives.

So, there is that lag between learning knowledge and putting it into practice. So, I am not accusing anybody of not using it soon enough. But, I am saying that we need to evaluate ourselves—we have to sit down and think, “Are we putting what we know into practice?”

Of all the holy days, Pentecost is the one that represents God’s people growing and maturing, being prepared for harvest; to be accepted by God.

So, has our growth in Godly character and Christian living matched our growth in knowledge and understanding? How close does it become?

We will turn to Leviticus 23. I always like to touch base with the holy day itself. I want to read God’s instruction about the day of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, as it is also called here in the Old Testament.

Leviticus 23:15-21 And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. [That seventh Sabbath was yesterday.] Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. [You can do it either by weeks or days.] You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the

bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. [Notice that the bread was waved with the two lamb peace offering.] They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. [As we are doing right now.] You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

These are the instructions for keeping the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Pentecost, and how they kept it under the Old Covenant. Beyond the counting—we know that Pentecost is unique because it is counted rather than given as a yearly date on which to keep it—what is unique about this holy day is the Wave Offering. This wave offering configuration is only given on this day.

This includes two baked loaves of bread to be waved. And we are specifically told that they are made *with leaven*. And so, they are waved before God, to be accepted by Him. These two loaves representing the firstfruits, as it says very specifically in verse 17, are made with leaven, indicating that they represent people who have been corrupted by sin. Leaven is the biblical symbol for corruption and for sin. So it shows in the image that there is corruption in the bread—leaven—which has been baked out of it, and then waved before God for acceptance. People (besides angels) are the only ones who can sin. So, it must represent people who have sinned.

We see that God does indeed accept these formerly corrupt people because they are accompanied by a kid as a sin offering, and two lambs as a peace offering. Without these sacrifices accompanying the two loaves, they could not be acceptable to the Father, because of what they represent.

Finally, we are also told that these two loaves are holy once they are accepted. And, it is also very important to understand that they are for the priest.

What can we learn from all this? I have five points we can learn from this passage.

POINT #1

We have, here, a picture of the process of evaluation—of judgment. How is this? It is in the picture of the waving most of all. When the loaves are waved before God, we moderns might think of it like waving hello to someone. But, the picture of it is of being lifted up before God. Why do this? It is the picture of being lifted up to the King on His Throne for inspection, as if to say, “Will You accept this?” And then He looks it over, from all sides, and then replies, “Yes, I will accept this. You can put this on my table.”

The idea, here, is that these loaves who had leaven in them have now been baked so that the leaven is gone, but they are still puffed up as loaves, which is the natural way of showing that over all these years we have been affected by sin; it cannot be totally removed. Look at our gray hair and wrinkles and all the things that have come from the hard lives we have lived. It is still noticeable that these people have been affected by sin in the picture. They must be accepted by God. They just cannot be passed over because they have had this corruption in them. They must be judged by the King—by God Himself. There is a picture in this sacrifice of the process of evaluation.

We can see, then, that Pentecost represents a period of judgment. And this judgment begins with the beginning of the countdown ending on the Day of Pentecost.

POINT #2

The loaves are made of fine flour. What does this mean? This is a picture that the materials that God is working with are good ones. Have you ever thought of yourself that way? That God looked down and said, “Wow! Of all the grain in the field I am going to pick the best ones to be harvested first so that I can make a meal for Myself,” as it were. “I want only the best, and I am going make sure of their harvest, their threshing, and then processing through grinding really fine, making it the best flour possible.” But of course, it contained sin, too. So, it is a really fine loaf. It looks perfect. It is something you would want to have. But, it does contain sin, too.

But, they have been baked. This is also part of the process of making this into a fine loaf. It has to be baked. The leaven gets baked out of it.

So God starts with the finest materials, but sin comes in, and it gets baked out to make it acceptable to Him.

So, this second point illustrates the process of sanctification. This is obviously a part of this period of judgment. God is judging us now. But, He is also sanctifying us. He is getting us ready. He is baking us. He is grinding everything down really fine, and then baking us through trial so that sin is repented of.

POINT #3

Despite all this grinding down, and baked in the fire, these wave loaves will only be accepted if accompanied with the sin offering, and a peace offering given at the same time. Despite all the work that God does in bringing us through this process of sanctification, it would do no good unless the sacrifice of the sin offering and the peace offering is made at the same time. Of course, these are represented in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He is our offering for sin; He is also our Peace. He is the One who goes before the Father, puts an arm around His Dad, and puts His other arm around us, and He says, “Let us have a meal together. Let us fellowship. And, I have brought you two together by My blood.”

And so, we have these two ideas—the sin and the peace offering—being done by Christ.

This represents our justification, and our redemption, as well as opening up of the way to the Father. There is a lot here in this particular regulation that applies to us.

POINT #4

The loaves are accepted and proclaimed holy once we are justified by Christ's blood, and the way is opened to the Father. There is peace, now, because it says that Christ is our peace as found in Ephesians 2 in concert with Gentiles and Jews. But it works in this way between us and God. Once we have been brought together, then God accepts us. He accepts us into His church, into His family, and we are then set apart—proclaimed to be holy—we are sanctified; we are different—a whole different category once that happens.

And this is why this particular sacrifice and offering—the wave offering—is not shown any place else in the Bible. It is different. It is unique. There are no others like this. The people of God are entirely different from the others. We're put into a whole different category.

God tells us that He makes us His special people. And, we become part of the Bride of Christ. There is only going to be one Bride. There is only one group of Firstfruits. And so, we can call this being proclaimed holy—our holiness.

POINT #5

The loaves are only for the priest. This connects with the fact that we are made part of the Bride of Christ. We have become His possession. These loaves were not divvied up among all the priests. They were not given. It was not like the time when David had come up and was starving along with his little band of men; he could not have this. This was only for *the priest* — the one doing the offering, as best as I can understand it.

The priest eats the bread. This is an interesting picture. He takes it into His body. And, the bread becomes part of Him.

Now, this is an illustration of becoming one with Christ. We could call this unification. We become one with Christ in everything. This is the flip-side—the obverse—the other side of the New Testament image of us eating Him and drinking His blood (in the New Testament Passover service). Do you see what has happened before that? Before we even have a chance to eat His flesh, and drink His blood, He has already taken us into His body through His calling and choosing of us.

So, we see in this one side of the fact that He absorbs us, and we absorb Him. The Bible does show both ways. He takes us in, and we reciprocate and take Him in. It is really quite a picture.

We become unified with Him; we become like Him. And ultimately, as it says in I John 3, we are going to be like Him in the resurrection. We are

going to see Him as He is! We are going to recognize Him immediately, what He is, because that is what we will have become through the process of eating Him.

We see all this in this really neat picture in the offering.

Did you notice anything missing in this scenario? I thought this very interesting, too. Remember the subject we are talking about. In the Pentecost offering there is only the barest whiff of knowledge being important to the preparation and acceptance of these loaves. In fact, if we were to go through the Bible and look at knowledge—there is a lot of good about knowledge in the Bible—but in a similar image, Paul says that knowledge puffs up (I Corinthians 5). In that image, talking about the lump of dough of a person and unleavened bread, he is saying that knowledge is part of the corruption, because we often think too much of our knowledge. It had become a vanity.

Paul also says in I Corinthians 13—the love chapter—that even if we had all knowledge, we are nothing without love. Love is the act and expression of Godly outgoing concern. That is what God is looking for. Do not get me wrong, I am not saying that knowledge is bad. I am saying that it is not as important as we sometimes think it is, because there are things that are more important when all is said and done.

Now, in this chapter, Paul is speaking about God's judgment, and he is explaining how righteous it is; that He is never wrong in the way that He judges; that He is going to give wrath to those who sin while to those who want to do what is right and repent and have the right attitude, He will give these eternal life.

Romans 2:2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

Romans 2:6-10 [God] who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance [note this word] in doing good [notice that] seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first

and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works—works!—what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

This is about God's judgment. And Peter said in I Peter 4:17 that judgment is now on the house of God—the church of God. And, we saw in the wave offering, it shows that we are under a process of judgment, because it is being waved before God for acceptance by Him.

Now, notice in this section, in verse 2, the words that Paul uses about how God judges the people who are trying to do well, as well as those who are not. Notice what God looks at. He judges according to the truth against those who practice such (evil) things. This is an action. To practice something is to actually get out there and try to do it to make it part of one's life. A doctor has a "practice," not because he needs more experience, necessarily, but because this is what he does. This is his normal way of engaging with his patience.

Now, notice the section beginning in verse 6. He will render to each one according to his deeds. He is judging deeds and says that He will give what people deserve on the basis of what they do. Deeds are doings.

Notice verses 7 through 9, "Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good," and then he goes and talks about those who do not obey; that is, they do not do what is right. And then it says in verse 9 that He is going to give tribulation and anguish to those who do evil.

So, He is looking at doings. Like I just said, deeds are doings. So, He is looking at people and how they behave themselves—how they conduct their lives. Are they conducting themselves in good ways—ones that He will accept? Or, are they doing things that He will not accept that are evil?

And finally, verse 10 where it says, "everyone who works what is good." And as we heard in the sermonette today, work is a good thing. God wants us to work. And, work is doing. Work is getting there into the trenches, and digging out what needs to be dug out, while putting in what needs to be put in.

So, the wording that Paul uses about God's judgment and evaluation of people have to do with His eyes being on what people do—not what they know, but what they do. It says throughout the book of Revelation several times, and I have given sermons on this myself, that we are going to be judged according to our works. If you go through Revelation 2 and 3, what does it say there? Jesus tells every single church—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and all the way through—"I know your....," knowledge? NO! He says, "I know your works. I know what you have been doing with the revelation that I have given you." And for five of them, He does not have very nice things to say about their works. He may say that, "I know that you have stood up to false apostles and such, but your love is growing cold. You did these things in the past, but what have you done for me lately? You are getting cold as ice. I think all your old battles have gotten to you, and you have hardened your hearts. Therefore, go back to your first things—your first love (which was Him)." And then He goes through each church and does the same things. He tells them what He has witnessed them doing. And He says, "This is my solution. This is what I am going to do if you do not change. So repent, or I will have to take your candlestick away from you. I am watching what you do," He says. "I am watching your works."

Now, our knowledge does come into play, here. And it comes into play in a very important and scary way. Our knowledge comes into play in the fact that, the more we know, the more that is expected of us. And so, that puts our backs against the wall.

We know a lot.

And as Luke 12:48 says, "To whom much is given, from him much will be required." You ought to go read that scripture yourself. He is speaking of getting stripes (of punishment). He says to those who need few stripes, I will give you few stripes, but to those who need lots of stripes, I will give lots of stripes, because if you know a lot, you have to answer for a lot."

That is what I mean by knowledge comes into play, here, in a scary way. Because we know more, God expects more from us.

So, for the sake of eternal life, we must be practicing what we know. We must get the production line of our life moving faster—moving what we

know into actions—our way of life! And then, for some of us, it is even stiffer, because James says in chapter 3 that teachers have a stricter judgment. And why? Because, teachers are supposed to know more than their students. And, they have the responsibility of imparting that knowledge to them. And so, they are really teetering on the brink if they are not putting what they know into practice.

It is scary! Are we taking what we know and putting into Godly living? Do our lives mirror the depth of knowledge that God has granted us?

Please turn to the book of Acts. We will touch back again on the Day of Pentecost. Now, what we need to know going into this, here, is that this is the day that the Holy Spirit was given to the church of God.

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

They were in harmony.

Acts 2:2-4 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

So, the Holy Spirit comes in with this great display of power, wind, and fire. And it says here that it sat upon each one of them, so it is not only coming in, but it is shown going to individuals. And then the Holy Spirit prompted them to do something, and that was to speak.

Moving down into Peter's sermon, I want to pull out this portion because he was questioned about why the apostles were now speaking in these different tongues. And he replies that in his mind, he was inspired to link this event with the prophecy in Joel.

Acts 2:18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.

And so, he is showing, directly from this scripture in Joel, that what the people had seen in the miracle of the Holy Spirit being given that it was a fulfillment of that prophecy.

And now, Peter is drawing them into the fact that they had killed Jesus Christ; He had been buried; He had been raised from the dead; He had returned to heaven, as it says here:

Acts 2:33 "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,"

Meaning that the Father gave Him the authority to be the One who dispenses the Holy Spirit, having received the okay to give it to men.

Acts 2:33 "He poured out this which you now see and hear."

Peter said that the fact that the Holy Spirit had come in this way, in such a magnificent, miraculous exhibition, was proof that Jesus whom they had killed, who was buried, had indeed been risen from the dead. And not only that, but He had gone off to heaven, sitting at the Father's right hand. And that the Holy Spirit had been given to men meant that He was on that throne doing His work! They could not see that, but this manifestation of the Spirit in the apostles was proof that Jesus did what He said He was going to do.

He was going to go to the Father, and He was going to give them the Helper. Remember John 14 and 16? He was going to give them the Spirit to bring them into all truth.

So, this was proof. He is there! He is alive! He is in heaven! He is on the job.

Acts 2:37-42 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren,

what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

So now we see in this section a reaction. We see that the Spirit has been given. We see that it cause the apostles to prophesy—to preach and speak. We see that it showed them that Jesus was on His throne doing His job in heaven. And now, we see that the Holy Spirit acting through the apostles caused a reaction in the people. They were cut to the heart. The words that Peter spoke to them smote them (to use the King James Version language). And they felt awful—horrible! “What do we do? How can we make up for this? Is there any way that we can have a part of this, now?” And he told what they can do.

But notice:

Acts 2:39 "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

What He is saying is that the promise of the Spirit of God was to them, that they would be able to become part of this congregation—this church. And, that it would do something for them. And that is what it did—that they continued steadfastly in the doctrine and fellowship, breaking bread and in prayers. It made them, it inspired them to do something. In this case, it inspired them to continuation (remember Romans 2?). In other words, what the Holy Spirit did was that it gave them the mind and the wherewithal to be devotedly persistent (the implication of continuation) and diligent in living by the teaching that they learned from the apostles.

So, we see that the Holy Spirit gave them two things I would like to point out here. (1) It gave them the ability to understand. And, (2) it gave them the ability to do.

It did give them the knowledge and understanding, but what God was looking for was that it would come out in behavior and conduct—in doing. And not only doing it once, but continuing to do it by enduring, by persisting in this way of life.

Now, back to the point about which is more important—the knowledge or the conduct?

Consider this from this scenario—how much did the 3000 souls baptized that day know? How much did they know about the plan of God? How much did they know about what Jesus had done? How much did they know about the meaning of the parables? How much did they know about the depths of the Sermon on the Mount? How much did they understand from the Olivet Prophecy?

I think we can safely say that they did not know very much. We cannot be sure that very many of these people were even ones who had heard Jesus. You would think that if they had heard Jesus at any length, that they would have understood a bit more about what Peter was getting at. But, these people seem to be fairly clueless. “What do we do?”

And so, they did not know very much before they were baptized. But, what did Peter and the apostles see? They saw that they were cut to the heart, and that they wanted to take action. They were humbled. They were changed people. And, when he gave them the instructions about what they needed to do, they did it. They responded. They repented. They said, “Baptize us! Please give us this spirit so we can be right with God.”

Do not get me wrong. Doctrine is truly important, and it needs to be learned correctly. I would not give an inch on that. However, what was more important to the apostles at this point in time is conviction, repentance, and devotion. They saw it in these people. These people were convicted—they were cut to the heart. And, they were repentant; they wanted to change. They

saw that they had sinned. They themselves had slain their Creator and Savior, and they wanted redemption. And it says as we went on that they continued. They were devoted. Not only were they cut to the heart just that one particular time, but that it went on. We do not know how long a time this period covers, but it was not just a flash in the pan and they were off. These people continued. And not only did they continue, they continued steadfastly. It keeps getting heightened. These people were really convicted and devoted.

And with an attitude like that, they could learn anything. They could be taught at that point. What the apostles wanted to see was whether they were teachable, convicted, and repentant.

And so we see that they were. They were baptized. They were taught the truth, and they put it into practice, and then they kept on keeping on.

You see, it is the day-to-day living where the rubber meets the road. That is what Jesus as our Judge is inspecting. That is what He is judging—our deeds.

Let us go through the New Testament for a moment, and go into several verses, reading them and then moving on. I want you to see what they say—their common theme.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Turn to John 14 and this famous set of verses. Here, Jesus had been talking about going and preparing for them, and He says,

John 14:4-6 "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

This is about Paul's conversion. Here, he goes, spewing out his threats and murders against the people of God,

Acts 9:2 ...and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now, please turn to chapter 16. This is out of the mouth of a girl who was demon-possessed, but she spoke the truth.

Acts 16:17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Now to chapter 18. This is Apollos being talked about, here.

Acts 18:25-26 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Acts 19:9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples.

Acts 19:23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.

Turn to chapter 24. This is when Paul was speaking before Felix.

Acts 24:14 "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

Acts 24:22 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings.

On to II Peter, now.

II Peter 2:2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

II Peter 2:21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

That is a bummer way to end, but that is the last of what the Bible has to say about the way.

You can see throughout the New Testament, Christianity is called the way. And in some places, it is even capitalized, because it seems as if the people called themselves that—that they belonged to the way. It gives you an interesting insight into their mindset at that time. They did not call it necessarily the church, or Christianity, which name was later given to them by others. But it seems like the people of God were people of the way. So, they looked on what they were being taught as a path. That is what the way is. If you look in the Greek, it is the word “hodos.” This is the typical Greek word for a path or road. That is how they saw their way of life. They saw it as a path that you walk on.

And what is walking? It is something that you do. They saw it as a verb almost. They saw it as a practice. The Greek word hodos is a lot like our own word “way.” We know that a way—we go to “Star Light Way,” and we know that it is a road, a thoroughfare, with that name. This is how the Greeks thought of it, too. But, like us, they also understand “way” in terms of traveling. “I am on my way to,” Nordstrom’s or something. It is a journey. They are traveling there. They are on their way on the way. They are traveling on a path. And so, therefore, you get the metaphorical usage, which the Greek also had, which comes up in this word, “the way,” as how the

people of God saw themselves. And that is, that it is a course of conduct. A way is how you behave, just like in English. It is a manner of thinking and of choosing—deciding—and then doing.

“This is the way I bake a cake.” It is a method—a manner.

In other words, in these examples I have given you throughout the New Testament, it refers to behavior in accordance with Christian principles and practice. That is how they are using “the way”—behavior. Emphasize that word—behavior with Christian principles and practices.

It is a doing. So, simply, it is a way of life—a way of living. And it is God’s way of living—how God would live as a man, and how God did live as a man on this earth. It is the way.

Remember what Isaiah 30:21 says? We go through it just about every year at the Feast of Tabernacles, “This is the way; walk in it.” This is the idea of “the way.”

Of course, we understand this. We have not told you anything that you do not already know. Christianity is a very practical religion. It is concerned with how we think, how we speak, how we act and react toward God, and toward our brethren, as well as toward others in the world. The Ten Commandments are a very practical code of behavior. It is about worshipping the true God. It is about family. It is about marriage. It is about inter-personal relations. It is about speech. It is about possessions. All of them are very practical things. This is our lives in a nutshell.

The same things could be said about the “Sermon on the Mount.” The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ expansion on loving God, and loving neighbor—the two great commandments.

And if you would really break down Paul’s most deeply theological explanations, they are in the end about our relationships with God and our brethren—how we walk along the path or way with Him. Can two walk together unless they be agreed? Well, we must learn to walk with God and learn to walk with each other.

So, in effect it really does not matter if we know what hypostasis refers to. Or, it really does not matter a great deal if we know the difference between an average and a true molad. Those are technicalities that some have taken to a ridiculous extreme—the same extreme as “how many angles can dance on the head of a pin?” Oftentimes it really does not matter. Maybe to get a point exactly right, you need to know those things, but most of the time you do not.

In the end God will not care if we know all the intricacies of ritual law as much as He will wish to see that we have a humble and sacrificial attitude, and live our lives in service to Him. That is the teaching of the ritual law. Are we humble? Are we sacrificial? Are we going to live our lives in service to Him, our families, and our friends? So when you get down to it, it is not so much what we know as what we do with it.

How much did Abraham know? We do not know how much God revealed to him. We know that he knew God’s commandments and laws. But, what is shown about Abraham? Abraham believed God, and he did what God said for him to do. And that man who never understood the Sermon on the Mount; who did not know all the intricacies of clean and unclean (as far as we know); who never heard Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, any of the “minor” prophets; or even Jesus Christ. He does not know about the Book of Revelation.

But this man, who believed God and did what He said is the father of the faithful. How much importance is knowledge compared to behavior, conduct, and doing what we know?

I was going to go into Galatians 5, so you might want to jot down verses 16 through 26, because this is all about walking in the spirit. If you live in the spirit, as it says at the end of that passage, then walk in the spirit. This means that if you have the Spirit of God in you, giving you life, which we all do, as this Day of Pentecost shows, then let us walk in it. That is what God wants to see from us—His investment in you coming out in fruit of growth, fruit of righteousness. Is He getting His “R.O.I.”? (His return on investment.)

You can do it, because you have God’s spirit. He has given you a vast amount of knowledge to work with.

It is absolutely wonderful that God has granted us so much knowledge and understanding of Him and His way of life. So it is incumbent, then, on us to whom much has been given to evaluate how well we are doing in putting what we have learned into practice in our lives. It is not enough just to know God's way intellectually. We must also know it to our bones experientially. We have got to live it, because that—in living it—is how true through-the-grave-character is formed in us. It is when we do it.

Let us finish in Colossians 1. This is God's prayer for you. It is also my prayer for you. This is through the writing of the apostle Paul.

Colossians 1:9-12 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.