

How To Know The Unknown

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Date: 13 February 1983

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[0 : 00] God and Father, open our hearts to thy word and thy word to our hearts, for Christ's sake. Amen. Please be seated and turn in the New Testament section of your pew Bible to page 157.

Amen. And there in the left-hand column halfway down, you will read these words, but as it is written, what no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.

Amen. Now, it's been a very busy week for me, and I'm sure it has for you. It's a very busy time of the year.

Acute depression should be setting in on most normal people sometime in the next week and should last for four to six weeks. And this is marked for you by the season of Lent.

So if you are really in tune, you will be ready to go with that depression by Wednesday night when you will have 40 days to work it through.

[1 : 19] And you may think it's a joke, but it's no joke at my end, partly because so many people come to me depressed, and I'm so depressed myself.

So that it's a difficult time of year. That's why I want you to look carefully at this text in order that you will understand what it is that Paul is saying.

I met one man this week who very much impressed me by saying that he had begun with Alcoholics Anonymous through a spiritual experience which consisted of standing on the 17th floor balcony of an apartment building and praying that God would prevent him from jumping off.

And God did, and he stopped drinking and has never taken a drink since. And it's a very real experience in his life.

It's the beginning of something very important. It's the step of putting your faith in a higher power, to use the language of Alcoholics Anonymous.

[2 : 33] Another distinguished gentleman that I met said that he would like to come to a place of faith, but not by pressure of extremity.

No 17th floor balconies for him. He wanted to do it in his right mind, in possession of all his faculties. He wanted to come to the place of trust and faith in God.

Another person says, I want to know now what God wants me to do. If he is God, he should be able to tell me what to do now.

And so this insistence on, or the desire that people have to know God is very real. And I run into it a lot of times in the course of a week.

But I want you to look at this verse because it divides up two kinds of knowing with respect to God. So, chapter 2, verse 9, page 157, Paul says, As it is written, and starts a small mystery because nobody's quite sure where it is written.

[3 : 46] But Paul says it's written, and so we go from there. As it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man can see.

So, something that is written concerns something beyond what man can see with his eye, hear with his ear, and imagine in his heart.

Now, this is fundamentally scientific knowledge. It's fundamentally the stuff that computers can store. What man sees, what he hears, and what his heart imagines.

You can bank it in computers so that it's available to you anytime. And that kind of knowing is scientific.

It's a... And science, if you look at the word, means, originally, in a primitive meaning of the word, it means to split up. To decide these are apples and these are oranges.

[4 : 52] To decide this is physics, and this is chemistry, and this is psychology, and this is history, and this... And they divide everything up. And that's what science does, to divide things up.

The word schism comes from the same root as science. Science. Schism is... And science are to know what the eye can see, and the eye may be magnified by telescopes and microscopes and electronic equipment beyond our imagining, so that the scope of the eye to see is almost unlimited. That's why our computers are struggling to cope with all the information that the eye can see. And if you add all the ways that the ear can hear, and all that you can get into a man's understanding through the hearing of his ear, then you multiply the function of the computer even more. And the other way of coming to know something is that your mind generates it. It's things that come up in the mind. It says what the heart imagines.

But it's those things that happen to you as you are in the shower, and suddenly it comes together, and you run and write it down. I don't know if you do silly things like that, but very often, on a walk, in a shower, lying in bed, listening to some music, things come to you, and you have to work with those things.

[6 : 24] So the eye and the ear and the things that come to your heart are the way that you know. But they're not the way you know God. That kind of knowing with respect to God produces agnosticism.

It produces a whole area of human life where you don't know. You don't understand. And because there is so much information available to you that you can know by the eye and the ear and the mind or heart of man's imagining, why bother with anything that's outside of that?

If it's outside of that, put it in the realm of things that you don't know. Now, most of us have been taught in school to think in this way, to observe with our eyes and our ears and for our hearts to imagine.

And anything that's beyond that, we have nothing to do with. One of the young men in the confirmation class said this week, in the course of profound discussion, and I commend it to all of you because it's a good place to discuss questions you can't discuss anywhere else because nobody will talk about them.

He said, I believe in God, but you can't prove the existence of God to me and you never will be able to because I will never be able to see him with the eye, to hear him with the ear, or to imagine him in my heart.

[7 : 58] And so he has a kind of schizophrenic thinking because while he believes in him on the one hand, he knows that he can't prove the existence of him on the other hand.

And the only God that you can imagine by the process of the eye, the ear, and the mind is a God of such, who has to be, by definition, of such infinite power, a God who put together the whole of the created order, the bounds of which are beyond our scope.

And you can't imagine that. You can only begin to imagine. And if all the computers and all the information that all the people in all the times of history pumped into those computers, everything that could be known, and then you said, please, who is God?

The computer would sputter. And wouldn't be able to say it because that way of knowing God is incomprehensible. You end up an agnostic.

You can't know. You may want to, but you can't. That way. So, look at the rest of the verse. And it says to you this.

[9 : 14] What those things can't know, God has revealed to us through the Spirit. In the line before, God has prepared for those who love him and has revealed to us through the Spirit.

Now, what this means is that what we can't know, God still has the right to reveal. And the great mistake that God has made is that for a scientific age like ours, that can probe the deepest recesses of space, and with microscopes examine the very constitution of matter, for a scientific world like ours, it's very difficult to be told that there are things we can't know.

And that is God. And so, what it says is that he has made these things known through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The difficulty being that God, while you can with your mind, or you can't quite, but the concept of God is so vast that people have stopped talking about it.

Because once you get on with a scientific mind to thinking about God, you've got too big a problem. You can't handle it. So then when God says, I want you to know me, and I am revealing myself in that person and that place in history where Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day rose again, that's where I am.

[10 : 55] So that you have science and the knowledge of science with a vast and incomprehensible concept of God, and you have revelation with way too narrow and highly defined

a concept of God.

And what are you going to do? Where are you going to turn? Well, that's what he talks about here. That it says that the Spirit reveals, or God reveals to us through his Spirit, these things.

Now, the way that the Holy Spirit does it is very scientific. And if you look at the process by which this revelation takes place, you will see that the Spirit searches the deep things of God, the depths of God.

That's in verse 10. He uses as a parallel the same truth about you as a person. First, nobody knows what you're thinking, least of all me as I stand here, and I can't help but wonder about some of you in particular, what you're thinking, but I can't know.

Because I don't know the Spirit that is in you. And nobody can know God except the Spirit that is in him. The difference, of course, is that you can't give me your Spirit.

[12:12] God can give me his to inform my mind and my heart so that I can know him better than I could ever know any of you or you, me.

Because he gives us his Spirit. His Spirit searches the deep things of God. Not only does he search them, but he is able to give understanding of them so that they are searched and then they are understood.

And the third thing that he does is he communicates them so that we can pass them on from one to another. And that's the function of the Holy Spirit, to search the deep things of man, the deep things of God, to make them known and to allow us to communicate.

Now that creates a different kind of community. A scientific community or a scientific society, they base their whole life on what they can know through the eye, the ear, and the imagining of the heart.

And they can know a great deal about a great many, many things. But they can't know God.

Because the only way you can know God is as God reveals himself to you, makes himself known to you by his Spirit.

[13:36] Now there's a difference in the kind of community that this results in. The scientific community, and I don't want to belittle it, but it's created some enormous problems for us because of the nuclear arms race, because of population through better sanitation, through better health care, through all sorts of things, the high production of food, knowledge of the eye and the ear and the mind have produced phenomenal things.

And that kind of knowledge has created a faith that many people believe in. The faith that, if we can wait for a few minutes before very long, they are going to find answers.

If we can last till those answers come, then we will be saved. But if you happen to wipe out before they come, well, it's not a very satisfactory faith then.

But that's the kind of faith that we've been given, that they are going to produce the answers. And in the meantime, we will remain agnostic, not knowing, because we're waiting for the answers to be produced.

And while we're waiting, we're frustrating the purpose of God, which is that by His Spirit, He will reveal to us who He is and who we are and how we are to respond.

[15:08] One last thing. I'm almost finished and you can be thankful if you like. Do you see what it says there? And I think this is terribly important.

In verse 9, the end of verse 9, it talks about what God has prepared for those who love Him. That essentially, the community to which God can reveal Himself by the Spirit is a community of love. Knowing scientific knowledge does not demand love. It demands reason and intelligence, but it doesn't demand love. God is able to reveal to love who He is because He is love.

So that the community that can receive the thing that God wants to reveal about Himself is not essentially a scientific community that's storing up knowledge, but a community that is practicing love.

love. Now, last week, we went away. And we had this conference and everybody, I think, was enormously helped. But at the end of the conference, there came out a number of requests.

[16:29] Train us to lead Bible studies. Train us to do evangelism. Train us to visit the sick. Train us to visit the shut-ins. Train us to call on our neighbors. Train us to be hospitable to this. All these requests came pouring out of the conference.

And I haven't slept well this week wondering how on earth you meet all those. Well, I want to tell you the first step in meeting all those. And that is, it's not a matter of being taught things to know

with your eye, your ear, and your mind.

But it's essentially being taught in a community of love. Because love can learn things which the eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear, and the heart of man can't imagine.

Love can learn. And so the first requirement is to be a loving person in a community of love. Would you like to all turn around and love one another now?

That's an impossible proposition really, isn't it? But it's what we're called upon to do. To be loving and caring for one another deeply. In order that God by his spirit can reveal to us the things he wants us to know.

[17 : 50] The things he wants us to understand about himself. I think it's as simple as saying that you're not going to find a wife by looking on a computer chart and letting your specifications be known and asking the computer to produce it.

You're still going to find a wife or a husband by meeting somebody and by walking down the lane together hand in hand and revealing yourself to one another.

Making yourself known to one another. And in exactly the same way we are terrible and profoundly handicapped if all we know is what we can know by the seeing of the eye the hearing of the ear and the imagining of the mind.

Because we are eliminating that knowledge which God wants us to have as a loving community which is the work of his Holy Spirit in a community of love.

Teaching us to relate to one another on that basis. And that's the first lesson I think as to how we are going to do the task that we have to do called to be disciples of Jesus Christ in the kind of world in which we live.

[19 : 14] Will you just be quiet where you are and close your eyes for a moment. Thank you. Thank you. Our God and Father what we can't know we ask that you will show us and open our hearts to the possibility that things beyond any capacity we have to know and to understand can be revealed to us.

And give us the humility to meet you at the place and in the person where God humbled himself even in Jesus Christ on the cross.

And allow your Holy Spirit to show us who he is. we ask this in his name. Amen.