

NOW WE KNOW IN PART

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"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

We are so ready to think we can know everything. That tendency is strengthened by the general attitude of people to look to a leader and take everything he says to be the final word. A great deal of harm has come from following leaders on everything, both their good and their bad ideas. We need to recognize that they know only in part.

A leader who can get people to follow him in everything he says can be effective, but inevitably some people will see some mistakes in what that leader says. Some of the things he says may be just guesses. When his followers take their stand on these things on which there is no clear evidence, often another human tendency comes into play -- his followers will turn against him completely. Many a person has been turned against clear Christian doctrine because the leader he looked up to spoke just as dogmatically about many questionable matters as he did about the great clear teachings of Scripture.

We need to recognize that the great propositional revelation from God upon which we stand gives us only a partial knowledge. There are many data which are not available to us, and many concepts that are not accessible to us.

You ask a little child who has never seen a banana what a banana is and he is quite lost. He doesn't have the data. Then you hold up a banana in front of him and say, "Here is a banana." Now

he knows what a banana is. But now you ask him what it tastes like and he cannot tell you. He must have the experience of tasting the banana before he can even attempt to describe what it tastes like. And I'm not sure any one of us can describe the taste of a banana in a way that will convey our meaning to people who have not themselves tasted a banana. There are data and concepts that are not available to us. So when we try to explain everything about God, His nature, and His plan, and go beyond what is clearly taught in Scripture we quickly get into areas where we either do not have the data, or the concept.

For example, ancient man, in fact man up to the last few centuries, knew one fact and if he was careful and observant he might know another fact. These two facts seemed to contradict one another because man did not have the concept that would bind them together. The first fact he knew was that everything falls down if it is not held up. That is one of the first things a little child learns -- if he is not held up he will fall. Some say the fear of falling is the earliest fear that develops in a human being. Everything falls down. But there is another fact available to ancient man if he thought and observed the data. Most did not, but a few did. That is that the earth is round. As they saw a departing boat disappear on the horizon, the lower part would vanish while they could still see the upper part. The only reasonable explanation for this was that the surface of the water was curved. The roundness of the earth was well known to a number of intelligent thinkers from very early days. But one reason why this truth did

not become accepted by the majority of people was the fact that these two ideas seemed to contradict each other. You fall down, yet the earth is round. How can it be round? Everything on the other side would fall off if it were round because everything falls down. When Columbus spoke of sailing around the world, people said it was ridiculous. You would get to the edge of the earth and fall off because everything falls down!

This seemed reasonable in the light of what people knew then. Clear proof that the earth was round did not come until 1520 when Magellan actually sailed around it. After that it was still a century and a half before the concept was found that explained how the fact that everything falls down and the fact that the earth is round could both be true. The answer did not come from data seen upon the earth. In fact, if the earth had been surrounded by a cloud layer so that the sky could not be seen, the answer probably never would have been discovered. One astronomer spent many years observing the motion of the planets among the stars, trying to explain exactly why they moved the way they did. His complicated theory to try to explain it was further developed and still there seemed no reasonable explanation as to why the planets moved the way they did.

Then Isaac Newton pondered the matter and the idea came to him that we do not fall down at all, but that everything is attracted to everything else. He worked out a formula for the degree of attraction that would explain the motion of the planets. Today gravitation is a concept familiar to all of us. It seems so simple

we think people must always have known it. But it probably never would have been discovered if it had not been for the study of the planets and the motion of the heavenly bodies.

This illustrates the fact that in God's economy there may be many vital concepts some of which we may never understand until we see our Lord face to face. Then that which seemed difficult to understand will be made plain. But in our present situation it is vital that we recognize the fact that though we do see some things, yet we see through a glass, darkly because there are many concepts we do not have.

This comes out clearly in the very first verse of Genesis. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The great Self-existent Being who controls all things created the world in which we live and everything else in the universe. He did this in the beginning, but whether it was the beginning of all existence or whether He had created other worlds before, the phrase "in the beginning" does not tell us. The next verse says, "And the earth was without form and void." The word "was" is a dynamic word meaning it "became." Does that mean there came into existence an earth without form and void at that time? Or does it mean that a great important event in God's economy -- perhaps including the fall of Satan occurred -- and then as a result of this the earth became without form and void? Or does it mean that He created the universe and all sorts of things occurred; then the time came when He had planned that those things would come together which would produce our world that was then without form and void with darkness

upon the face of the deep? We can theorize to try to understand it, but we know in part. We don't have the data or the concept to understand it all.

The same is true about the great central facts of our Christian faith. We believe in the deity of Christ. That is a simple fact. Jesus Christ was a man. He walked about in Galilee. He talked to people. He touched them. He ate. He slept. He was a human being, just like any of us. But Jesus Christ was God. He had created the universe. Even while He was a babe in the cradle He was directing the stars in their orbits. He controlled all things. He is God. How can He be man and at the same time be God?

For 300 years thinkers in the Christian church troubled over that question. Some would say, Jesus Christ is God and man but He was not a real man; God was expressing Himself in the form of a man. They said, God is one and He shows Himself in different characteristics. Naturally the church reacted strongly against this because the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was a real man. He was not just God. Others would say, Yes, the great Father controls all things and Christ was a man who is separate from Him and God entered into Him and used Him. But the church reacted against that also because Scripture clearly teaches that He is God. How can you resolve it? You cannot understand it. But both facts are clearly taught in Scripture so we believe them both. During those three centuries the church went through paroxysms of arguments and discussions. Some took the stand that He was more God than man; others took the position He is more man than God. Finally Arius

began making songs for everyone to sing:

There was a time before Jesus Christ was.

After than He was begotten,

and He created all things after that.

He was truly God after that.

But there was a time before He was.

The church nearly split in two over it. The Council of Nicea, in 325, adopted the simple statement that Jesus Christ is of the same substance with the Father. I don't think anyone knows what that means. It does not mean they are one substance like mud, or clay or something that they both are made of. It certainly does not mean that. God is Spirit. But we all know it means that Jesus Christ is a real man, but also that He is God. Both are taught in Scripture. We believe it is the foundation of Christianity, but how are they fit together? It may be that when we see Him as He is we will become aware of some concept that will make us see how simple it is to understand how this can be. Again, maybe we will never understand. But we know both facts are true about Jesus Christ.

Though people thought that was settled at the Council of Nicea, they continued to argue about it at great length for 60 years. Then at the Council of Constantinople, in 381, the church leaders agreed that He is of the same substance as the Father and that He is truly man and truly God. They thought that settled the matter, but they had a new problem. How is Jesus Christ both really man and really God? Apollinarius had a simple suggestion. He said, Jesus Christ has a human body, a human soul, and the divine spirit

takes the place of the human spirit. The Council of Constantinople hated to criticize Apollinarius because he had stood strongly against the Arians through those difficult years. But they declared this view was definitely heretical because Jesus is fully man and He is fully God and yet He is one Person.

The discussion continued. At the Council of Ephesus in 431, Nestorianism was condemned because that view made Christ two persons, a divine person and a human person. There is only one God, but there is a distinction. Therefore all those who hold that you cannot say that Mary was the Mother of God because Mary was only the Mother of the human Jesus, are heretical. The Nestorians were cut out of the church and went over to Asia where they led thousands of people to believe in Christ and did a tremendous missionary work. Then persecution put an end to Nestorianism in the Orient. In 431 it was ruled out of the western Christian church and now it is only a fact of history.

Then some went to the other extreme. They said, Of course Jesus is not two persons, He is one person. He is one Spirit, only one Spirit. They called themselves Monophysites, one spirit. So at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, orthodox Christians believed the whole matter was settled and the conclusion was made that orthodox Christians ever since have held to. But what did it say? It simply denied all attempts to explain, and took the simple Biblical facts that Jesus is God and that He is man. They said, We believe in one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures without confusion, without change, without division,

without separation. The two natures cannot be separated neither can they be confused. He is two distinct natures, two complete natures, and yet He is only one Person. They believed exactly what Paul and Peter and the others said from the beginning. They simply denied all attempts that had been made to explain it. We simply do not have the concept; we do not have the facts to explain it.

So it is natural for the non-Christians to say, These ideas are absurd; they cannot be proved. Man cannot understand it. There are concepts we do not have. Just as the concept of gravitation was unknown before Kepler and Newton. And probably it never would have become known if they had not been able to study the skies. But once you have the concept it is clear. We have the propositional revelation that Jesus Christ is God, that He is man, and that He is fully God and fully man. He is natural like the rest of us, except He is without sin. We cannot understand it, but it is taught in Scripture and we believe it.

In the area of eschatology different groups seek to explain all the details, and one group will attack the beliefs of another group by picking on little points and saying, "How can that be? How can it be that during the millennium people with resurrection bodies and people with natural bodies can live together on this earth? Consequently the whole idea must be wrong." Just because some little detail is not fully understood.

Regarding God's plan for the Jews, Paul said that all Israel would be saved. When will that happen? The Bible clearly says that God has a future for Israel whom He has kept all through these

years. It is the only nation from antiquity that still exists. God has plans for Israel, but when we get into the details, how easy it is for some to go way beyond what Scripture teaches. How easy it is for others to say it does not fit at all with our Christian teaching and throw the whole thing out. We must take what Scripture teaches, stand upon it and not feel that we have to make a whole complete system that explains everything.

If there is one fact that is clear in Scripture it is that Jesus is going to return to this earth and that Christians are to live looking and longing for His return. The disciples saw Him ascend back into heaven and the angels said to them, "This same Jesus....shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Daniel saw one like the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven and there was given him dominion, and glory and a kingdom that shall not be destroyed. Scripture clearly teaches that a time is coming upon this earth when Jesus Christ will reign in person and put down all evil. He will reign with a rod of iron. Why should He reign with a rod of iron if everyone is to be converted? Some will need His rod of iron in order to keep them in order.

There is no evidence of anyone prior to 200 A.D. ever raising any question about what was then called millennairianism, or chiliasm, which in recent years has been called premillennialism. In the third century, under the influence of Greek philosophy, some began to take more and more of Scripture teaching figuratively. And in the fourth century when Emperor Constantine became Christian, many Christians began to feel that the time of glory and

happiness was to come through human means with the power of the empire putting down all that is wicked.

However, a comparison of Isaiah 11:4 with 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and Revelation 19:15 clearly indicates that this time of universal peace and safety is ushered in by the return of Jesus Christ in person to establish His kingdom which will continue for a long period designated as 1000 years.

When someone says, I do not see how there can be a millennium in which saved people in resurrection bodies and unsaved people in natural bodies live together as the same time, we recall those ancients who could not see how the world could be round without people falling off of it instead of down toward it. There can be any number of concepts we do not have. People make guesses about various details of conditions during the millennium.

There is much figurative language in Scripture, but certain facts are clear and we must stand on them even though we cannot see their relation. How Jesus can be both God and man. How God the Son is distinct from God the Father and be only one God. We cannot understand it. We can make terms to describe it, but the Lord wants us to take the facts of Scripture and to stand on them and recognize that the things we do not understand are seen through a glass darkly [in a mirror, dimly], but when that which is perfect is come when we are in His presence then the part we could not grasp will be made clear.■