

AN ADMONITION on the True Knowledge of God

by Dietrich Philip

An Anabaptist leader from the 1500s wrote this in-depth study on the fundamental principles of our salvation, namely the true knowledge of God, true faith, sincere love, and a living hope. May this study help you to examine yourself, whether you are in the faith; "prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (II Cor. 13:5). This study should also help you to liberate your mind of any misconceptions and false ideas about what God is like.

GREETING

Unto the beloved and faithful brethren and sisters who have obtained like precious faith with us (2 Pet. 1:1), we wish much grace, peace, and mercy, from God our heavenly Father, and from Jesus Christ, our only Lord, Redeemer and Saviour, who gave Himself for us, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father, to whom be praise forever. Amen. Gal. 1:4

AN ADMONITION ON THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

I thank the Lord, the most high God of heaven and earth, and rejoice in my inmost soul, that I hear of your faith in God, of your knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and of your love toward all believers (Col. 1:3,4; 2 Thess. 1:3), and I pray God, the eternal Father, through Jesus Christ, that He would preserve you to the end in the true faith, in a fervent spirit and in pure love, that you may daily grow and increase therein, that you may be unblameable in the day of the Lord, full of all good works and righteousness which are obtained through Jesus Christ, to the honour and glory of God.

I admonish you be the love of the Spirit that you thank God at all times for His unfathomable mercy which He has so abundantly manifested to us. Remember that in time past (Eph. 5:8) you sat in Egypt (that is, in darkness), that you were the servants of sin, led captive by the devil according to his will, and how wonderfully God delivered you. Take to heart the fact that you were so deeply in debt, and could not pay, and that God graciously forgave and remitted all. Remember that with the prodigal son you were long estranged from your heavenly Father (Luke 15:13-24), that you committed much fornication (that is, idolatry) with the Babylonian harlot, and that God in His goodness and long-suffering so graciously received you and made an everlasting covenant with you, gave you Jesus Christ as a free gift, and rejoiced with the

angels of heaven over your conversion.

Therefore take heed to yourselves that you have not received the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1), but remember that you have been called of God out of darkness into His marvelous light (Eph. 5:8), for this purpose that you might walk as children of light, and that therefore many sins have been forgiven you (John 8:11; Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 2:24), and that you should no longer sin, and that you have been graciously received by God, the heavenly Father, to the end that you should serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of your lives; for this reason God has chosen, called, and accepted you in Christ Jesus. This is also prefigured to us in the gospel by the many whom Jesus healed and commanded to go in peace and sin no more lest a worse thing befall them.

For this reason I have undertaken to admonish you briefly, and to present to you by God's grace the principal articles (fundamental principles) of our salvation, namely the true knowledge of God, true faith, sincere, unadulterated love and a living hope; for, where there is no knowledge of God there is gross ignorance, and there evil predominates; where there is no faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6); he that has not love abides in death (1 John 2:11; 3:14); and where there is no living hope toward God and of eternal salvation there is a despondent mind and a troubled conscience (1 John 3:20).

God, the Father

In the first place we must rightly know God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost (John 17:3). In the knowledge of God the Father three things are primarily comprehended:

1. His eternal omnipotence and omniscience, by which He created all things.
2. His eternal, divine justice, by which He so sternly punishes sin in both men and angels (2 Pet. 2:4-6).
3. His unfathomable and fatherly mercy, in that He gave us Jesus Christ as a Redeemer and Savior (John 3:16).

A knowledge of the almighty power and wisdom of God teaches us how we shall at all times trust in God alone (Psa. 33:16-20), from Him alone to seek, pray for and desire help, protection, salvation and all good gifts, and not of any creature in heaven or in earth (Psa. 111:2-10), for there is none that can help us but the almighty God alone, who said to Abraham: "I am the almighty God" (Gen. 17:1), "thy shield" (Gen. 15:1), that is, One having all authority, the perfection of goodness, who said to Israel: "I am thy Lord and Savior, the Holy One of Israel, the righteous God and Savior, and there is no God beside Me."

A knowledge of God's justice teaches us to fear God, to sincerely repent, to forsake sin, to be terrified at God's wrath and judgment, and to seek after righteousness, that we may not fall into the hands of the living God, for because of this God so openly showed His justice toward His angels in heaven which sinned (2 Peter. 2:2), toward Adam and Eve in Paradise (Gen. 3), toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24), and toward many others, that He might thereby make public examples of His eternal justice, that we might learn to fear and behold Him as a just God and Judge, yea, as an invincible God and as a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

A knowledge of the mercy of God teaches us to love God, because he so loved us, that He gave His only begotten Son unto death for us, that through Him we might live forever (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10); "for God so loved the world," says John, "that He gave His only begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In other words: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9). In short, God's love is revealed to us from heaven in this that He gave us such a precious treasure, His most beloved son, as a gift, together with all the heavenly riches as a possession.

God, the Son Jesus Christ

In the knowledge of Jesus Christ also there are three things especially to be noted and remembered:

1. His true divinity, in which He was born of God from the beginning, and is one with the Father from all eternity (Mic. 5:2; John 1:1; 10:30; 14:9,10; 17:21).
2. His pure, spotless humanity which, of the Word, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, was made flesh (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35; 2:7; John 1:14), and not by the flesh and blood of any man.
3. His grace, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, redemption and salvation (Jer. 23:6; John 17:23; I Cor. 1:24; Col 2:3).

The knowledge of the true divinity of Jesus Christ teaches us to look upon Him as our only Redeemer and Savior, and to believe Him as our Lord and God, that through Him we may be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-5; John 14:1; 14-28); for this is the will of God that he that sees the Son and believes on Him may have everlasting life (John 6:40); but he that does not believe shall not see life; "but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36; I John 5:10). Now, no one can believe in the Son Jesus Christ without a right knowledge of His true divinity; for we may believe in no one but God alone, and without faith there is no salvation (Heb. 11:6; John 6:40). (I speak of adults and intelligent persons). Hence the knowledge of the true divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is pre-eminently necessary to salvation.

The knowledge of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ teaches us to consider and comprehend the overflowing riches of God's grace, that for us He sent and delivered His only first-born and only begotten Son, His eternal and almighty Word in the likeness of sinful flesh to the most ignominious death of the cross (Eph 2:6,7; John 1:14; 3:16; Rom. 8:32; John 1:1; Rom. 8:3; Eph. 2:13-16; Phil. 2:8). He also assures us that through Him we have free access to the Father by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18), since He has become our Brother, like us in all things except sin (Heb. 2:11,12; 5:2), that He, our faithful High Priest, Reconciler and Mediator with God, might succor us and have compassion on us in our human weakness (Heb. 2:17,18; I Tim 2:5; Heb. 8:1; 10:19); for we needed such a Mediator who was both God and man, that in His true divinity He might be fully able to help us, and in His true humanity also have patience with our weakness, inasmuch as He is a man, tempted in all points, yet without sin, which He never knew (Heb. 2:14,18).

The knowledge of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that we cannot be saved by our own works or any other means, nor to seek our salvation otherwise than through the merits of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:4-6); for He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and eternal life (I Cor. 2:30); he is our Redeemer, Advocate, Reconciler, Savior, and Mercy-Seat (I Tim. 2:5; I John 2:1,2; Rom. 3:24-27) through faith in His blood (Col. 1:14; 2:13-15); His suffering is our joy, His cross our triumph and glory, His death our life, His resurrection from the dead our resurrection to everlasting glory (I Cor. 15:22,23). His ascension our way to the Father; His union with us is our union with the Father and makes us

partakers of the divine nature and of immortality (John 17:21; 2 Pet. 1:4).

God, the Holy Spirit

In the knowledge of the Holy Ghost also three things are to be noted:

1. His truly divine being, in the which He proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 16:13; 14:17; 15:26).
2. His efficacy in all believers; for He comforts, strengthens, and seals unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30); He teaches them to fear God, to believe in God, to call upon Him and pray to Him as we ought (Rom. 8:26,27; I. Cor. 12:3); in short, He bestows all good, spiritual gifts, according to His will.>
3. His reproof of sin in the world, that is, of unbelief, of false righteousness, of the unjust judgment which the world passes upon the children of God and upon all divine things (John 16:8-11).

The knowledge of the divinity of the Holy Ghost teaches us that we shall believe His teaching and His witness, because He is God, who alone is true, and cannot err (Rom. 3:4); therefore all that the Holy Ghost has declared and spoken through the prophets and apostles, yea, through Jesus Christ Himself (2 Pet. 1:21) is the eternal and abiding truth and the testimony of God (Psa. 111:8).

The knowledge of the power and work of the Holy Ghost in all believers teaches us at all times to pray to God through Jesus Christ for the Holy Ghost that He would lead us into all truth (Matt. 7:7; John 14:26; 12:16; 16:13; 17:3; 1 John 2:20,27), make us partakers of all His spiritual gifts, comfort, strengthen and preserve us in the wholesome doctrine of Jesus Christ, in the true faith unto the end and help us to enter into the kingdom of our heavenly Father.

The knowledge of the reproof or conviction of the Holy Ghost teaches us to recognize the unbelief of the world, its false righteousness and its unjust judgment; for the Holy Ghost reproves the world through the children of God and through the witnesses of Jesus Christ, of its unbelief, that it does not believe in Jesus Christ, because it rejects His Word, His doctrine and His testament, and accepts, believes, and follows the doctrines of men instead.

The Holy Ghost reproves the world of the false righteousness in this that, with the Jews, they seek to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3-6) by such works and ceremonies as have been invented, devised and instituted by men; therefore they will not submit themselves to the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ, and which avails before God (Rom 10:3,4).

The Holy Ghost reproves the world of judgment, because they praise and justify the ungodly, and reproach and condemn those who fear God, because they call good, evil; and evil, good; because they take light for darkness, and darkness for light, so that neither Jesus with His kindness and fellowship, nor John with his sternness and seclusion satisfies them, but they constantly slander and reproach unjustly the godly (Matt. 11:18,19; Isa. 5:20), condemn and kill them as heretics, even imagining that they are thereby doing God a service. All this the Holy Ghost reproves in His operation, that is, in the pious Christians in whom He performs His work.

HENCE we must rightly know the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Matt. 3:16,17; 28:19; 1 John 5:4-7), that they are the true, living God, beside whom there is none other, neither in

heaven nor on earth. This God has created us, has redeemed us, has taught and enlightened us; He is our fortress and our deliverer, our Savior and our All (Psa. 18:2); in Him we must believe. And what true faith is, the apostle describes for us to the Hebrews as follows: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). That is, faith trusts in the invisible God, and hopes for His grace, and seeks after the things that are not seen and eternal (2 Cor. 4:18; Col. 3:2); for faith has three characteristics by which it may be known and distinguished from all unbelief.

The first characteristic is that nothing but God's Word is believed, for faith comes by hearing of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; Psa. 116:10,11), and not from the doctrine of men; for faith looks to God alone, and believes Him faithful and true in all His words and promises, and all carnal men deceitful (Jer. 17:9); hence faith judges not by the word of men, however plausible and good it might appear to be, but by God's Word alone.

The second characteristic is that faith believes all God's words, and makes no exceptions; for all God's words are as a fire (Jer. 23:29), and a shield to all who put their trust in Him (Psa. 119:114), and God has so earnestly commanded that nothing should be added to or taken from His Word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Josh. 1:7; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18,19), but to do according to all His words and commands. And Christ says in the Gospel: "Man shall love ... by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4; Deut. 8:3; Psa. 104:29).

Therefore all words of God must be believed, and not only some, according to our fancy, and the others rejected.

The third characteristic of true faith is that faith seeks God alone and eternal salvation (Col. 3:1,2), seeks those things which are invisible and heavenly, lays aside everything that is temporal and transitory, knows no man after the flesh (2 Cor. 5:15), seeks not things human, but things divine, and looks not upon man's work and righteousness, but on Jesus Christ alone (Matt. 16:12,16).

Such faith had Abraham, the father of all the faithful (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 5:6); for he believed God above nature in the birth and offering of Isaac (Gen. 15:6; 22:17; 17:2,16,19; 18:10,11; 21:1,2), he also believed all God's words although it was a sore trial to the flesh, as may be noted in the matter of the circumcision, and his readiness to offer Isaac unto the Lord, also that he did not regard temporal things, but left his father's house at the Lord's command, looking for another city, which has its foundations in heaven, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:8-10), as the apostle says.

From this it is evident that those who have true faith reject all the doctrines and opinions of men, and trust in God alone, take His Word as truth, and confess all God's Word as being right, and obey it, and with all diligence seek heavenly things. On the other hand, those who set the doctrines of men above or on a par with God's Word, seek temporal things more than the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33; 1 Tim. 4:8), are unbelievers, and however beautifully they may speak of the Scriptures and of faith, it is mere vanity and has no weight. From this faith springs love, which is the greatest, highest and first command, both in the law and in the Gospel, namely, that we shall love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our might and all our strength, and the second is like unto it, namely, that we shall love our neighbor as ourselves; for on these two commands, says Christ, hang all the law and the prophets (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-40).

The love of God must have precedence, so that we for God's sake will leave all creatures, all the things that are seen, yea, father and mother, brothers and sisters, wife and children, and even our own lives (Deut. 33:8,9; Matt. 10:37-39; Luke 14:26), as the Scripture very plainly teaches us, both by word and by example; for God, who is a jealous God and a lover also

(Ex. 20:5; Deut. 5:9; Psa 88:18; Jer. 31:3), will have us to love and cherish Him thus, because He has thus shown his love toward us, as the apostle says, that Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, died for us ungodly beings, that He gave us His Holy Spirit, prepared His eternal kingdom for us, called us unto the knowledge of His Word, in short, has given us all good things (Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 1:2-5; Tit. 3:4-6; Psa. 84:11; Rom. 8:32), therefore we must in return love Him above all else that is in heaven and on earth. And we must prove this love by diligent obedience to all His commands, as Christ Himself teaches in plain words, otherwise it is not love, but a vain pretense of love (John 14:21; 15:10; 1 John 5:2; Jas. 1:17).

Next to this we must love the brethren. Of this brotherly love the Scripture, Christ and His apostles teach us so abundantly that it is unnecessary to write more about it. This love is not merely that which supplies a poor brother's temporal needs, but that we remember the brethren and sisters in all our prayers, beseeching God in their behalf, and being concerned about their souls, and that when we see someone erring from the way of truth we shall in meekness of spirit admonish them from the Word of God that we may win their souls and save them from destruction (Rom. 12:9-13; Col. 3:12-14; Eph. 5:2; 4:15; 1 Pet. 4:8-10; 2 Pet. 1:7; Gal. 6:5,6; Jas. 5:16,19,20; 1 John 5:16).

Where this love is found, there all that is good is found, yea, there God is, who Himself is love (1 John 4:8); there Christ dwells, there the Holy Spirit abides, there is the lovely gathering of brethren and sisters who are of one heart and one soul (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Psa. 133:1); there the anointment of the holy oil of gladness flows from the head of Christ upon all His members (Psa. 45:7; Heb. 1:9; Psa. 133:1); there the dew of divine grace falls upon Mount Zion, making fruitful in righteousness and holiness all who are pleasing to God; there God bestows His heavenly benediction and gives life eternal; there is true joy, not carnal, but spiritual; there is the beautiful Jerusalem which is above (Gal. 4:26; Rev. 22:2), which is builded as a city (Psa. 122:4), that is compact together; there the tribes of Israel gather to praise God; there the Holy Spirit brings rest and peace to the consciences and hearts of the believers in true Christian love and unity; there also is found the living hope, whereby the believer hopes for salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ, yea, so that he is assured and certain that he is being sanctified, and that he has the witness of the Holy Spirit in his heart (Rom. 8:16), whereby he is assured that he is the child of God, that Jesus Christ is his brother, and that he has the fellowship of the Holy Ghost (2 Cor. 13:14).

Thereby the believer becomes so light of heart, so comforted and so full of joy, that he is rich in the midst poverty, that in anger, persecution, prison, yea, in the midst of death, he rejoices and says with Paul: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him (namely the crown of righteousness) against that day" (2. Tim. 1:12). This accords with what the prophet says: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psa. 27:1). In other words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early" (Psa. 46:1-5). And the prophet yet says: "O Lord, ... whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (Psa. 73:25,26).

This liberty of the mind brings about the living hope in God, and the certain assurance of the

grace of Jesus Christ and the sealing of the Holy Spirit unto eternal salvation, by which the heart becomes so joyful that the believer is comforted under all circumstances to be with the Lord, and in the real life to come into full possession of all that he by faith looks forward to in hope, and which he now sees but darkly as through a glass and knows from words more or less dark (1 Cor. 13:12).

Therefore, my beloved and cherished friends in the Lord, and chosen of God in Christ Jesus, take heed to the true knowledge of God, continue steadfast in the faith, love God and the brotherly fellowship of Jesus Christ, and hope for His grace, and you will never be brought to shame. Beware of all false doctrine (Matt. 7:15), all idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22), do not allow yourselves to be terrified on account of tyrants and persecutors, fear not mortal men, but fear the almighty, living God (Luke 12:4,5), who created you, gave you body and soul, and has called you to His everlasting kingdom that shall never pass away. Think of the great joy and glory that shall be revealed in you (Rom. 8:17,18; 1 Pet. 1:3,4) in time to come at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Take an example of patience from all the holy people of God who have lived since the beginning of the world (Jas. 5:10; Heb. 12:1), and have suffered, and follow in their faith.

Now the God of all grace, and the Father of all mercy, who has chosen you unto everlasting glory through Christ Jesus, strengthen, confirm, and establish you in His eternal truth, perfect you in faith and in all good works and preserve you unto His heavenly kingdom, that you may inherit and possess it with all the saints forever. Amen. (1. Pet. 5:10; Heb. 12:28).