

I Know Whom I Have Believed

By Armin J. Panning

Hardly anything in life is more taxing to our physical and emotional stamina than doubt and uncertainty. Nothing is worse than indecision. The prospect of having to make a major decision, such as the choice of our life's work, or contemplating a change in vocation, or even weighing the pros and cons of a major purchase, such as buying a home or a piece of property, all of these are decisions that can cause us a great deal of soul-searching. Restless days and sleepless nights are likely to draw from us the anguished cry, "if only I knew what the right course of action was!" We find ourselves quite willing to accept a decision, which ever way that decision may go, but we do want to know which is the better course, which is the right decision. For a quiet, useful, and productive life man needs to know.

If that is the case in our temporal life, which lasts but for a few decades, how much more is that not true for our spiritual life with its duration into eternity. What a hell on earth to live our entire life in spiritual doubt and indecision, not only not knowing where we came from and what we are doing here, but even worse, not knowing what lies in the eternity ahead! What a blessing to find a man who could give us information that would give us serenity now and security forever!

We have such a man. It is the Apostle Paul, the author of the words that have been chosen as the theme of this convention. Paul says, "I know." And the apostle is quite willing to share his "secret," for he has written to his good friend and understudy Timothy. We have his letter in which he enlarges on his confident statement, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Ti 1:12).

Our immediate reaction may well be to counter: It would be wonderful to have Paul's confidence, but can we trust him? The question is a legitimate one. If we asked a financial advisor or an investment broker to stop by and give us some advice regarding the handling of our money, we might reasonably expect him to show some signs of success in handling his own money. If he appeared at our house in an old, rusted-out car and wearing tattered and torn clothes, we might perhaps have some second thoughts about the advice he had to give.

A superficial view of Paul's circumstances might leave us with a similar disillusionment. The author of those confident words to Timothy is writing from prison (2 Ti 1:16,17) where he is awaiting the verdict of a criminal charge that has been brought against him (2:9). His friends have forsaken him (1:15; 2:17; 4:10), and by his own admission, he is not very optimistic about release. In fact, the death penalty is as likely as acquittal (4:6,7). Can we trust the advice of such a man, or are his words just empty bravado and bold whistling in the dark?

A partial answer lies in taking a close look at Paul's claim, particularly the verb he uses when he says, "I know." A fringe benefit from all the varying Bible translations that have appeared of late is that they force on us the realization that the original has subtleties that are not easily caught and conveyed in translation. We are faced with such a linguistic subtlety here when Paul says, "I know."

Greek has two main verbs and a number of lesser verbs all of which are roughly synonymous and mean "to know." The two main verbs are *oida* and *ginosko*. In trying to help us reach some clarity in distinguishing these two, Hermann Cremer in his *Biblio Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* suggests that the verb *ginosko* implies an active relationship proceeding from the knower to the object of his knowledge" (p. 230). The key thought here is the *active* relationship proceeding from the knower to the thing known. The subject (the one doing the knowing) contributes. The knower brings expertise and ability. He draws on experience. He forms conclusions about the object (the thing that becomes known). In short, with *ginosko* the knower actively contributes to the learning process. It is significant that Paul does NOT use that verb here.

Rather he uses the verb *oida*. With regard to that verb Cremer again says that the object (the thing known) "has simply come within the sphere of perception, within the knower's circle of vision" (p. 230). When Paul therefore says *oida*, "I know whom I have believed," he is making no claim for active participation in the

learning process. Paul did not on his own reach into the area of divine things and wrest for himself the truths of God, truths on which he can now confidently live and die. Paul did not come to God. No, quite the opposite, God came to him. God sent into Paul's "circle of vision" man's only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, whom to know is eternal life. In his prison cell on death row Paul could be so sure of what he knew because that knowledge of a Savior had come to him from God.

Knowing Christ Is a Gift From God

But how did that knowledge come to Paul? There are various ways in which the question might be answered. If Paul were to answer, he might say, as he actually does repeatedly in his letters, that it was by the *grace* of God. Paul never forgot how close had been his call with certain death and damnation. In his perversity and blindness Paul was on a collision course with Christ. In tones of palpable horror he later admits, "I persecuted the church of God" (1 Co 15:9). Throughout his life Paul never ceased to marvel that by the grace of God a "blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious" (1Ti 1:13) could be brought to know Christ and even to serve as an apostle of him.

But there would be yet another way in which to answer the question. How did the knowledge of Christ come to Paul? We might say that it was given to him directly by God himself, or more specifically, by Jesus Christ. The noteworthy feature in Paul's case is that in one aspect the transfer of knowledge was "immediate," i.e., it took place without the employment of the usual means or media. It was brought by God in person.

The incident is, of course, a familiar one and needs little elaboration. Paul, or Saul, the proud Pharisee, was determined to win his way to heaven by his own good deeds and his own performance. His zeal for Pharisaic work-righteousness caused him of necessity to cross paths with the Christians, relying as they did on the grace of God in Christ, without any merits of their own. To Paul that seemed not only foolish but dangerous, a heresy forcibly to be rooted out wherever it could be found. His murderous zeal against the Christians in Jerusalem turned into an obsession that led him to persecute them even in foreign cities (Ac 26:11).

As you will recall, armed with letters authorizing him to arrest Christians, Paul set out for Damascus. It was here on the road that he was struck down by a blazing light from heaven, and the voice of Jesus of Nazareth demanded, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Ac 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). Blind and terrified, and dependent on his companions to lead him by the hand, Paul obeyed the Lord's instruction to continue on to Damascus. In the ensuing three days of blindness the shattering events and words on the road percolated through Paul's soul, and he came to see himself for what he was—a helpless and hopeless sinner, a blasphemer and a persecutor, fighting against Christ and his body the Church.

But God took pity on Paul in his misery and graciously sent him relief in the person of a certain Ananias. Ananias restored Paul's sight and then relayed to him the message: "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest *know his will*, and *see that Just One*, and *shouldest hear the voice of his mouth*, for thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Ac 22:14,15). The point of God's dealing with Paul was to give him *knowledge*. He was to learn to know Christ by seeing that Just One and hearing the voice of His mouth. So far Paul's knowledge came from God directly. God's instruction was, as we noted, "immediate," without the ordinary means.

It is significant, therefore, that the Lord at once applied also his usual means of grace, namely, Word and Sacrament. Ananias continues, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Ac 22:16). Through God's appointed means of Baptism, water connected with the Word, there was conveyed to Paul the forgiveness of all his sins. He was assured that in Christ Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, there was pardon even for him, blasphemer and persecutor though he had been.

And to this one-time means of grace in the form of Baptism there was added the command to use the continuing and daily means of grace in the form of God's Word. Paul was directed to "call upon the name of the Lord." God's name, of course, is everything that He has made known about Himself, everything that He has revealed in His Word.

We are given very few details about Paul's activity immediately after his conversion, but we may be sure that he was obedient to God's command and immersed himself in the Word. As a zealous Pharisee, Paul had already applied himself intensively to a study of the Scriptures, i.e., to the Old Testament. He had learned all the minute regulations of the Law. He knew the historical facts of God's dealings with Israel. He knew the wording of the prophecies. But he had never really understood any of these.

Now under the guidance of the Holy Spirit everything appeared in a different light. Christ became the center of all God's dealings with men. Christ's sacrifice was foreshadowed in the ceremonies. Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy. Christ was the guarantee behind every promise in Scripture. And under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Paul learned that all of these promises applied also to him. Paul not only learned to *know* Christ but also to *trust* and to *believe* in him. Hence it is not mere verbiage when he says, "I know whom I have *believed*." It is a faith that was wrought in him by the Spirit working through the means of grace.

Just how important the work of the Holy Spirit is in teaching men to know Christ, Paul himself indicates in his first letter to the Corinthians. No doubt he was thinking back to his own former spiritual blindness as indicative of all men in their natural state when he wrote: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." But then he adds, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1 Co 20:10). As Paul sat in his lonely prison cell in Rome, he could remain confident and unshaken in his trust, for he realized that knowing Christ was not a self-sought or a home-made thing, but it was a gift from God. His faith was the result of the Holy Spirit's working in him through the tangible and objective means of Word and Sacrament.

Nor is Paul's case the exception. To be sure, there were some unusual and dramatic aspects in Paul's case, but in its essential features it was duplicated also in the life of his young understudy Timothy. Timothy too was won by the Word as that was used by the Holy Spirit.

Humanly speaking one might say that Timothy did not come from the most promising of backgrounds. In distinction to the strict Jewish family life in which Paul grew up, Timothy was the product of a mixed marriage. His mother Eunice was a Jewess, but his father was Greek (Ac 16:1). To judge from her Greek name and from the fact that even as a young man old enough to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys Timothy had not yet been circumcised (Ac 16:3), we may well wonder just how "orthodox" by Jewish standards Timothy's upbringing was.

And yet, Timothy had one very important thing going for him. Paul says, "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Ti 3:15).

Whatever may have been the disadvantages and deficiencies under which Eunice worked, she did teach her son the Scriptures. Significantly, when Paul came to her hometown of Lystra and proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of those Scriptures, Eunice is given the high praise of being included among those who "believed" (Ac 16:1). Not only did she herself believe, but her son Timothy was allowed or perhaps even encouraged to become Paul's "vicar" and accompany him on his Missionary journeys, there to learn ever more fully about the Savior.

Paul speaks in favorable terms about both of these stages in Timothy's life. Regarding Timothy's youth in his parental home, Paul thanks God as he remembers "the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (2 Ti 1:5). In regard to the second stage, namely Timothy's learning to know Christ under Paul's training, Paul is confident that that has taken place, for he urges Timothy to hold on to that which he has received. He bids him: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Ti 1:13).

But in both of these phases of Timothy's life, Paul is very much aware that it really is not he or Timothy's parents who have conveyed the true knowledge to their young scholar. Rather it has been the Holy Spirit working through the Word. Concerning the Word, the Gospel message, Paul says, "That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. Consider what I say: and *the Lord give thee understanding* in all things" (1:14; 2:7).

Paul leaves no doubt. Knowing Christ is a gift from God. It is the *Lord* who gives understanding. Retaining that conviction is essential for Paul. As he pens his second epistle to Timothy, Paul is expecting a martyr's death. Eagerly he longs to see Timothy and he urges him to come to Rome with all speed (4:9). But Paul's concern is not just for himself, or even primarily for himself. His chief concern is for the continuation of the Gospel ministry that is now to be headed up by Timothy. His dominant interest is that Timothy be properly equipped and fitted for the task. One senses as he reads the letter that Paul fears Timothy may arrive too late to find him alive, and hence he sets down in writing what he would tell Timothy if he should not arrive in time. *Second Timothy* is a "swan song," Paul's parting words to his successor. Surely, here he would be inclined to tell Timothy all that he needed to know for the exacting task that lay before him. And there is discussion of the qualifications and requirements needed for conducting the Christian ministry (2:22-26). But it is significant, I believe, that Paul says nothing about any special or extraordinary gifts required. He does not make any mention of his own case, of having been directly and "immediately" called by Jesus himself on the road to Damascus. Nor does he speak of having been endowed with the gift of healing (Ac 19:11,12) or with the ability to speak in tongues. (1 Co 14:18). He does not expect or require such of Timothy. The whole letter proceeds on the assumption that God has given Timothy all that he needs through the Word, the Scriptures which are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Hence Paul in the closing chapter of the letter can sum up the whole of his advice in one short statement: "Preach the Word!" (4:2).

There is in that a commentary on what has become a disturbing feature of the Church in our time. There is the feeling in some quarters that what is needed to revitalize the Church is an active seeking of the special and the dramatic gifts of the Spirit. The implication is that you are only a second-rate Christian if all you have is confidence in the Word. Trusting in your Baptism is somewhat disparagingly referred to as relying on "water-baptism." If you would be a full-fledged Christian, one able to work and to be truly productive in the Kingdom, then you must have a second baptism Spirit-baptism. Reception of such baptism is to be attested to by a visible display of the dramatic and sensational spiritual gifts, preferably the ability to speak in tongues or to practice the art of healing. It seems rather evident that such a view does not reflect the emphasis of Paul's final, earnest words to Timothy.

Nor is such a view consistent with our Lutheran heritage or the Reformation's premise of *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone. Luther was unalterably opposed to those who claimed to accept Scripture as the truth of God but then did not let the Scriptures retain their full meaning. These were the Romanists who claimed to look to Christ as their Savior but denied the sufficiency of his redemption and effectively undercut Scripture's promise of grace by requiring the sinner to produce the merits earned through a life of good works. Luther rightly charged these false teachers with destroying the sinner's basis for trust and confidence by their offering less than the Scriptures promise.

But Luther also opposed the false teaching of the "heavenly prophets" who went beyond the Word. These enthusiasts sought support for their political theories and radical doctrines by claiming special gifts from the Spirit and by claiming direct revelation from God to supplement or even to supplant Scripture. "Scripture alone" was too confining for them.

Under God Luther realized that the sinner's basis for confidence is secure only when he relies on *all* of Scripture and *only* on Scripture. In this conviction he was, of course, proceeding on the same basis that Paul employs when he says, "I know whom I have believed." Both of them relied solely on Jesus Christ, man's only Lord and Redeemer, the Savior set forth in the Scriptures.

Choosing as a convention theme the words, "I know whom I have believed" is then an invitation for us to re-examine Scripture and to go back to the "exceeding great and precious promises" that we have in God's Word. Without exception, the truths on which our confidence rests did not come to us in dramatic fashion. They were not seared into our mind by a blazing light on the road to Damascus, nor did they come to us suddenly in a great "tower discovery" in Wittenberg. Rather, they came through the small, still voice of the Word. So quiet and unobtrusive is the Word that I dare say most of us here cannot remember back to a day when we did not know the great truths of God's grace: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn

1:7). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus “ (Ro 8:1) “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8), for “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in, him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16)

Through Word and Sacrament (which is, of course, nothing other than the Word attached to visible elements), the Holy Spirit has taught us those precious truths. We know them and we believe them. They give us confidence in good days and in bad. They hearten us to work for our Lord. They help us fight temptation and enable us to live a life to his glory. And not the least, they give us strength and courage to die the Christian’s death.

All that is possible because of confidence drawn from the promises that are conveyed to us in God’s Word. We have those promises and with Paul we can say, “I know whom I have believed.” But let us note well that it is not our knowing them so well that makes the promises reliable. There will always be differences in the degree of knowledge that we have. Saint Paul tells Timothy, “In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of but also of wood and of earth” (2:20). Men differ in the acuteness of their spiritual insight. Hopefully in lifetime of preaching or hearing sermons, in teaching or learning from Bible classes, we will all grow in knowledge. But we do not become the more saved by our degree of knowledge.

Just as we dare not depend on the amount of our knowledge so also we dare not rest our confidence on the strength and firmness with which we believe the promises. As a sainted professor of this school was wont to say some thirty years ago: You will have days when even faith in Christ “tastes like rotten wood.” What he meant to prepare us for was, of course, that there are times in every Christian’s life when we do not “feel good” about our faith. It is at such times that we need to realize that God’s promises are so sure and reliable, not because we believe them, but because he made them. God gives. We receive. That is the very heart of Scripture’s teaching of grace and also the core of Paul’s confidence when he says, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that *he is able to keep* that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

All of Paul’s concerns have been committed to the Lord. The outcome of the trial and its effect on his own life, the result of his preaching, the Gospel cause now to be transferred to the administration of young Timothy, none of these cause Paul undue concern. The issues of life and death, of time and eternity do not depend on weak and frail men, for as Paul assures Timothy, The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2:19).

We took some time before to distinguish between *oida* and *ginosko*, the two main Greek verbs of “knowing.” We note that *ginosko* implies activity on the part of the subject (the one doing the knowing). It is significant that this verb, which Paul does not claim for himself when he says, “I know whom I have believed,” this verb is, however, attributed to God. God actively does the “knowing” that is spoken of here. He seeks out His own.

It is, in fact, God’s “knowing” that makes men children of God. For it is to be noted that the verb *ginosko* implies much more than simply the bare gaining of knowledge. It bears a meaning somewhat akin to our English verb “to recognize” in the sense of “to acknowledge” and “to accept as one’s own.” It is a knowing with approval and affection. Just how deep this affection runs God himself indicates to us through the prophet Jeremiah when he says, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3).

Already from everlasting, from eternity, God has known us and loved us and recognized us as His own. And here in time His loving-kindness has sought us out and found us and drawn us to faith in Christ, so that we might now be His own dear children and He our heavenly Father. When we see that all of this comes to us “in Christ Jesus,” then we realize that knowing Christ is indeed a priceless gift from God!

Knowing Christ Is a Treasure to Protect

If our whole blessedness rests on knowing Christ, then follows it that we dare let nothing jeopardize our relationship to that Savior. It follows also, as a matter of course, that there be determined attempts by Satan and

his henchmen to deprive us of our treasure. Christians of all times need to realize that their blessedness will not long remain undisturbed or unchallenged.

Paul was aware of this, and he warns Timothy accordingly. His second letter to Timothy abounds in warning. Time and again Paul returns to the matter of false doctrine and false teachers (2:16-18,23; 3:1-8,13; 4:3,4). Particularly the third chapter paints a sobering picture of the unsavory and unscriptural element that Timothy will have to contend with. There will be people who are “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good ...” And so the appalling list goes on for half of the chapter. It is bad enough that these men themselves go awry and make shipwreck of their faith. But an even worse feature is that they will make inroads into Timothy’s congregation and pervert souls under his care. Paul says, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables” (4:3,4).

Tradition consistently links Timothy with the great church in Ephesus founded by Paul on his Third Missionary Journey. Some five or six years earlier, as Paul was taking his final leave of the Ephesian elders, he warned them in words that are remarkably similar to what he here tells Timothy. He says, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers ... for I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them” (Ac 20:28-30).

When the Apostle Peter writes to the five provinces of Asia Minor, which would of course include the city of Ephesus, he says much the same thing. He warns, “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, *even denying the Lord that bought them* and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pe 2:1).

What Peter and Paul spoke of as a future threat, that Jude deplores as a present reality. He writes, “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

The most damaging thing that can be said about false teachers is that they “deny the Lord that bought them.” Denying the Lord is totally and completely the opposite of what Paul says when he declares, “I know whom I have believed.” The One whom Paul has believed and trusted implicitly is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who has bought him at the price of his lifeblood. Paul warns so earnestly against false doctrine because he realizes that it is the antithesis to knowing Christ. False doctrine cuts believers off from their source. It deprives them of their blessedness in Christ. “Itching ears,” seemingly nothing very serious in themselves, are therefore a danger signal. They are a symptom, a symptom of the dread disease of becoming weary of the Lord who bought us.

Itching ears have not been cured. We need only to look about us in the world to see that they still abound. Who are the prominent and the popular preachers of the day? They are not the ones who are preaching the Gospel message of sin and grace and the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of sins. By and large, people want to hear something new. They want something novel to titillate the senses, or something intellectual to challenge the mind, or perhaps most compelling of all, they want something that seems “relevant” to the needs of the day.

The “old Gospel” is derided as offering only pie in the sky by and by.” What is needed, they tell us, is something for here and now. We are told that if the Church is to be effective, it must address itself to the social issues of the day. It must champion human rights and promote the cause of justice and equality; it must protect the environment and speak out on issues that affect the quality of life in a world rapidly becoming overcrowded.

But Paul knew better. On the brink of eternity, he knew that all temporal consideration mattered but little. It matters not whether his accommodations were plush and luxurious, or the rudest and barest prison cell. It mattered little how pure and unpolluted the environment, or how damp and dark the air of his dungeon. In

fact, it made little difference even whether he received civil justice in the courts, or whether his whole trial was a travesty. What Paul needed to know as he faced death was that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at the last day. Paul could not get such assurance from “fables” served up to please itching ears. Nor could he recommend such fables to Timothy for use in meeting the challenges that lay before him. No, something quite different was needed here.

Paul tells Timothy, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1). The “grace that is in Christ Jesus” is nothing other than the priceless gift of knowing the Savior and his salvation as that is conveyed to men through the Word. Hence Paul’s concern that the Word be safeguarded and protected. He urges Timothy, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing that was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (1:13,14).

The Gospel message, the “good thing” committed to Timothy and the Church, is something that is retained for ourselves and shared with others through language, through word and speech. Hence Paul is concerned that Timothy hold on to the “form of sound words,” i.e., the pattern of sound teaching that Paul had used. Ineptness and inaccuracy of expression can becloud the grace of God as that is set forth in the Word.

This convention is being asked to address itself to an issue very directly connected to the “form of sound words” in which the Gospel message is to be preserved to us and presented to others. I refer to the matter of Bible translation.

As we are all aware, I am sure, the original text of the Old Testament and the New Testament was written in Hebrew and Greek. These originals are the very words of God, inspired and unalterable. But for practical use in the Church, we need translations of the original. Translations, of course, come in various types and kinds. There can be translation into any language. The original can be translated into German or Swedish, Russian or French, as well as into English. Furthermore, in the individual languages, English in our case, there would be various ways of expressing what the original says. It is the original Greek and Hebrew that are inspired not the translations. We have no command from God as to which translation we are to use. But there is one absolutely essential requirement if a translation is to be adequate. It must “hold fast the form of sound words.” As clearly and precisely as possible it must convey *all* that the original says and *only* what the original says.

As everyone who has any experience with it knows, translating is a difficult art. Nor is it an easy task to evaluate the translation others have made. It is therefore a weighty assignment that has been laid on this convention in asking it to determine which translation is to be used in our Synod’s printed materials. When we look to the future and see what harm could be done by making a wrong decision, we might well shudder at accepting so grave a responsibility. And if we were left to our own resources and our own good judgment, there would be ample reason for fear and hesitation. But as Paul points out to Timothy, we really do not stand alone when we make choices and decisions that affect the Gospel’s course. He says, “That good thing which was committed unto thee, *keep by the Holy Ghost*, which dwelleth in us.”

It is the prayer of the Church which has chosen you as its delegates that the Lord would grant you a rich measure of His Holy Spirit to guide you in making a decision that will serve the larger interests of His Kingdom. When we sing, “God’s Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever,” we are not voicing a proud boast. It is rather the confident response of a faith, which trusts God’s promise that He will remain among us, and through His Word will help us to keep that good thing which He has committed to us.

Knowing Christ Is a Treasure to Share

Retaining the Word is of utmost importance to us for our whole blessedness in Christ depends upon it. And yet, retaining the Word is not something purely self-centered and a mere looking out for ourselves. No, rather, it enables us to carry out our Godgiven task of sharing Christ with those who do not as yet know Him. Both in our life as individuals and in our corporate life as a church body, we need to be clear on the fact that knowing Christ brings with it both the privilege and the obligation of sharing Him.

That connection between knowing and sharing was something that was made clear to the Apostle Paul from the very start of his Christian life. Recall Ananias's explanation of God's reason for calling Paul. He says, "The God of our fathers had chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will and see that Just one, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. *For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard*" (Ac 22-14). Knowing Christ and sharing Him were inseparable entities for Paul.

When Paul now writes to Timothy from Rome, he is passing on the torch to his younger colleague. Solemnly he directs Timothy: "I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine...Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (4:1-2,5,6).

The task of sharing which was conferred on Timothy has come also to all of us to whom the Savior has said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Ac 1: 8). Nor are we given any assurance that the task of sharing will be either easy or cheap. As we well know, it cost Paul his life. And Paul does not try to hide from Timothy that there will be disadvantages for him also. He says, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecution, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecution I endured." And he adds, "Yea, and *all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (3:10,11).

By grace we live in a land of religious freedom, and we thank God for that privilege. But that does not mean that we will be spared all cost and inconvenience connected with the Gospel. There is levied upon us even here the price of ridicule and rejection, often from those whom we are most zealous to win for Christ. And there is the on-going financial burden of supporting programs whose costs are annually growing in direct proportion as the Lord is granting us increase. Add to that the decidedly disadvantageous picture projected by our national economy, and we get the message that considerations involving budget will have to occupy a good portion of our time and energy not only in convention, but also when we return home and apply ourselves to the less glamorous aspect of paying for what was voted. We dare not delude ourselves. Sharing the Gospel is expensive. And yet, it is a necessary expense—necessary because our Savior has asked it of us.

In speaking of the cost involved in sharing the Gospel, yet another expense that we dare not overlook. We need to realize that doing the Lord's work will "cost" us our sons and daughters. What the Gospel needs more than money is manpower. It needs people with warm hearts and a passion for souls. When we, like Paul, see our own limitations and how our time is running out, then we are forced to look to the next generation. We need young men and women to prepare themselves to be preachers and teachers of the Gospel—young, energetic people who will be the "feet" to go to places where we ourselves cannot go, and who will be the "lips" to speak the message to people whom our voice will never reach. As fathers and grandfathers we need to urge our sons and daughters and our grandsons and granddaughters to forego the lucrative and distinguished careers they admittedly could gain for themselves in the world, and instead to use their God given talents in the cause of the Gospel. But let us not look at recruitment merely as a family affair. Let us lay it also on the hearts of the congregations that we as delegates will be reporting back to. Let us impress on them that their contribution of future workers to the Church is as urgently needed and confidently expected as the money that they contribute as a matter of course.

But where are we to find the strength for an ambitious and energetic program of sharing the Gospel? Where are we to receive the zeal to work tirelessly ourselves? Where the spirit of self-sacrifice to give unstintingly of our material goods? Where the courage to ask others to make sacrifices for their Lord? Hopefully the discussion of the past hour will have made the answer unmistakably clear. That strength can come only from knowing Christ as our Lord and Savior.

To all who have that knowledge Paul says, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Ti 1:7). There are some marked similarities between our situation and that of

Timothy, anticipating as he was the loss of his spiritual father and teacher. We too as a Synod have suffered the loss of a beloved and trusted leader. We would be remiss if we did not recognize his faithful and devoted labors in the Kingdom. We thank God for all that was accomplished under his long and faithful administration.

But mixed with the gratitude and the nostalgic memories there may also be a touch of uneasiness. We ask ourselves: Can things continue as they were? Or will our program of sharing the Gospel perhaps now falter? Paul bids us put away our apprehensions, because God grants to his Church not the spirit of fear but of power. Together with obligations and assignments, together with offices and appointments, God always grants the ability to carry out the work that he wants done. We need not fear a change of administration when it is God who grants the “sufficiency” needed to carry out his tasks.

Furthermore, the promise of a “spirit of love” gives us reason to be confident also that harmony and concord will continue. You may find yourself sitting among delegates, many of whom you do not know or know only slightly. You may not know what they are thinking or what their feelings and opinions are on certain issues. And when you do find out, you may realize that you do not agree entirely with them. Decisions will have to be reached by majority vote. And yet, despite honest differences of opinion regarding programs or policies, there is one over-riding consideration that submerges all differences. That consideration is that we all serve one and the same Lord. Among those who share a common knowledge of and a love for the Savior, there will be also the spirit of love and Christian charity toward one another. “How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” is not just an unattainable wish expressed by the psalmist. It is a present reality among all those who in Christ Jesus share God’s spirit of love.

Finally, Paul speaks of the “spirit of a sound mind.” It has been said that conventions are unpredictable. That may be in the sense that one cannot predict what the outcome of a particular resolution will be. But it is not true that they are haphazard in doing the Lord’s work. Conventions do not have to be “rigged” to make the resolutions come out right and thus accomplish God’s will and work—not when our Lord grants to his children the spirit of a sound mind.

These three qualities of power, and love, and a sound mind might at first sight seem to be an unusual combination, and yet they really are not. There is a common denominator. That common denominator is knowing Christ. In the full exercise of our spirit of power and love and good Christian judgment, let us then confidently address ourselves to the work that lies before us, saying with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”