

Learning Is Hard

Commentary for May 1, 2009 — Why Is Learning So Hard?

The article this month is "Development of New Doctrine" from a 1975 tape by Dr. Ernest L. Martin. First read the "[May 2009 Newsletter](#)" for information that introduces the article. As Dr. Martin points out, teaching and learning continued and greatly expanded after the gift of God's Holy Spirit was first given at Pentecost in 30 AD. It took almost two decades for the *ekklesia*, particularly in Jerusalem, to learn some important lessons that were given to them by Christ through the Holy Spirit:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost [Spirit], whom the Father will send in my name, he [1] shall teach you all things, and [2] bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

• *John 14:26*

Jesus made two promises about the Comforter: [1] the Holy Spirit will teach new things they were to learn, and [2] the Holy Spirit will cause them to remember old things they learned from Jesus, things that fulfilled His prophecies and those of the Old Testament. At that moment the apostles did not understand much of what He said during His ministry. The process of teaching new things and remembering old things began at Pentecost. The process of learning new doctrine was slow and difficult for the apostles and all the disciples because the new things they were learning did not fit their prior understanding about God and His ways. They had to learn the true meaning of several Old Testament passages.

"The fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). The disciples had a fear of YHWH and a love for Christ resurrected. They were ready for important teaching from God which began at Pentecost.

So why do we seem to have difficulty learning the Word of God today? If we have the fulness of the Gospel contained within the New Testament and available to us, why do we still find it difficult to learn God's Word? Why are we not passionate to learn about God our Creator?¹

The apostle Paul stated that in Romans 7: 14–25 that there was a struggle between his desire to do the right and good things, yet his flesh has desires in another direction. This is because our fleshly nature struggles against our spiritual nature, if we possess God's Holy Spirit:

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

• *Romans 8:5–7*

Where Is Truth to be Found?

Writing to the *ekklesia* in Ephesians, Paul describes to his audience what they learned, that truth was to be found, and in whom truth was to be found. He encourages everyone to live not as the unconverted Gentiles with their wicked and lascivious ways, because he says:

1. Without God's Holy Spirit it is possible to be educated yet never **"come to the knowledge of the truth"** (1 Timothy 3:7). In that verse, the word **"knowledge"** in Greek is the word *epignosis*, which means full knowledge. Paul gives examples of educated ignorance apart from God's revelation in Romans 1:18–32.

“You did not so learn Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

• *Ephesians 4:20–24*

Note particularly the underlined statement: **“the truth is in Jesus.”** Christ Jesus, the Word of God, the Messiah, He is the source of truth:

“That we should be to the praise of his glory, [we] who first trusted in Christ. In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

• *Ephesians 1:12–13*

Note the sequence: first comes the hearing of God’s Word which is the Gospel of salvation about the Messiah, the Christ, then comes belief and trust in Him (see John 20:31). Next comes our sealing by the Holy Spirit through Christ from God Himself.

An Analogy from Handball

In college I took a physical education course learning to play 4-wall handball. You wear a glove on each hand and hit the 2.3 ounce hard rubber ball with either hand. The shock and pain to the palms of my hands from the first 1/2 hour session hitting the ball was surprising. My hands swelled for two days afterward. I endured pain in order to enjoy the fun of a recreational sport. Over the weeks the pain in my hands decreased as my hands became used to slapping the ball. Learning is like that at times, but the pain decreases as the lessons are learned. In fact, our entire life is a painful educational experience, to be understood only at our resurrection.

Solomon says that **“much study is a weariness of the flesh”** (Ecclesiastes 12:12). When Paul was defending himself, the Roman procurator Festus thought that Paul had been driven mad from too much learning (Acts 26:24). Yet God is in total control of our education process:

“No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall be all taught of God.’ Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me.”

• *John 6:44–45*

Studying God’s Word at times also involves discomfort and sometimes even pain as we learn new knowledge and understanding, yet it benefits us here and now. God is in charge of our learning. Paul tells us [1] the source of our learning, [2] the benefit from our learning, and [3] the ultimate purpose of our learning at the present time²:

“For whatsoever things [1] were written aforetime were written for our learning, [2] that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: [3] That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

• *Romans 15:4–6*

Read Dr. Martin’s article and learn about the early *ekklesia* and how God was glorified.

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2. Paul expands on that theme in 2 Timothy 3:14–17.