

# Understanding

## *The Scripture:*

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

## *The thought:*

In a way “understanding” is a good Biblical equivalent for the more modern concept of “mind.” It is closely related to the concept of knowledge or knowing. What we know and understand with our minds is a very important dimension of our Christian life and experience. While we must always be careful not to over-intellectualize the Christian faith, it is vital that its basis in “knowing” be maintained.

What I know does not make me a Christian by itself. Yet, some basic creed is essential to true faith. We have to confess something. We have a true basis for our faith. Even a very simple creed such as “Jesus loves me” helps to define the focus of our faith and our understanding. A more elaborate creed such as “I believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ Jesus his Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, and the resurrection of the body” clarifies more fully what we may confess. Clear understanding is essential in focusing my knowledge of truth in a way that brings us into accord with the Scripture and with the community of faith. It helps us to know what others believe and have believed in the past. We are not to be lone-rangers by ourselves living in accordance to what we feel at a particular time. Rather, our understanding needs to be grounded and rooted in God’s truth.

As the following hymn expresses so powerfully, we may not know a lot of things but we do know and have the assurance that God has committed himself to us through his Word, both spoken and written. We can have confidence in this fact. We can stand on the promises of God.

## *The song:*

*I know not why God’s wondrous grace  
To me He hath made known,  
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love  
Redeemed me for His own.*

*But I know Whom I have believed,  
And am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I've committed  
Unto Him against that day.*

*I know not how this saving faith  
To me He did impart,  
Nor how believing in His Word  
Wrought peace within my heart.*

*I know not how the Spirit moves,  
Convincing us of sin,  
Revealing Jesus through the Word,  
Creating faith in Him.*

*--Daniel W. Whittle (1883)*

***The question:***

What do I know about the basis of my faith? How important is that knowledge? What are the essentials of Scripture upon which I base my faith?

***The experience:***

I think that for me one of the wonders of life was going to college and discovering that there was a whole world of intelligent people who believed in the truth of the Bible and God's gospel as revealed through it. I am not sure what I thought before that point. I probably assumed that because of the seeming "smallness" of my background I was sort of on my own and that I was peculiar and odd. It was great to share a common faith with my peers.

In college, I learned that while many of my "growing up" experiences were different I was more or less normal. I had grown up in a different country with a different heritage and with different parents. But surprisingly there was a lot that I had in common with my classmates. I suppose that most of this apparent difference between me and others was really just a normal part of life. Much of my feelings of personal strangeness were probably what would be called "culture shock" today.

All of this was part of the development of my understanding of myself, of my world, and how God fit into the "big picture." You might say that I was growing in my perception. Maybe a better term is wisdom. I was accumulating vast numbers of experiences and facts but then putting them into a helpful order. I was making sense of

my world. I suppose one might call this a “meta” or a “beyond” level of comprehension.

Some years ago a faculty colleague and I discussed whether a primitive man sitting outside a hut could think “great thoughts.” Our conclusion was that he could indeed think great thoughts but that he might not have the “hooks” on which to hang them since he was not aware of the centuries of great thoughts that informs modern civilization. For example, a mountain tribesman in New Guinea might contemplate “life after death” but he would not have access to the many pages of writing describing the ideas of heaven and hell. All of this is true in the Christian faith as well. Understanding comes when we put our experiences and facts into the overall context of God’s purpose and understanding for us.

Knowledge and understanding are not things beyond the Christian faith; they are an essential part of it. We must always be reminded that “all truth is God’s truth” (Arthur Holmes) and that “there is no conflict between the best in education and the best in the Christian faith” (Bertha Munro).