

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. All human pretensions are cast down in the presence of the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9).
2. One day Heaven's books will be opened, and there will be no escaping their verdict (vs. 10).
3. No human dominion, no matter how seemingly impregnable, is safe from God's judgment (vss. 11-12).
4. The appearance of the Son of Man is the ultimate game changer (vs. 13).
5. The everlasting dominion that has been given to the Son of Man is our greatest and only sure hope (vs. 14).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does the Ancient of Days wait for the casting down of thrones to sit (Dan. 7:9)? What might this symbolize?
2. What does it mean for us that the books of judgment will one day be opened (vs. 10)? How should we be living in light of that?
3. What purpose might there be in allowing the beasts to live for a time after their dominion is taken away (vs. 12)?
4. Why does the Son of Man seem to come from somewhere else before appearing before the Ancient of Days (vs. 13)? Where might that place be?
5. Why is there immeasurable comfort in the fact that the Son of Man's kingdom will never end (vs. 14)? How does that give perspective to our lives now?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

As burning fire

Fire is one of the most powerful forces in the world. It can be a terrifying weapon with tremendous destructive force. Few things have had such an important impact as fire has had on human history.

Fire is an appropriate symbol to relate to God. Jehovah revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exod. 3:2-6). In Daniel's vision, God is seen sitting on His throne in the midst of fire (Dan. 7:9). This speaks of His authority and power to evaluate and judge the hearts and actions of men and angels. In the end, God will cast the wicked into the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 15).

Ten thousand times ten thousand

This huge number in Daniel is intended to convey the fact that Almighty God has an innumerable host of heavenly servants ready to do His bidding. These numbers are an accommodation to the mind of man to emphasize God's majestic omnipotence.

In 2009, the president of the United States traveled to Great Britain for the G-20 summit. It was reported that he arrived with the presidential limousine known as "The Beast" and a VH-3D helicopter known as "Marine One," which always flies in a group containing several identical helicopters.

The president's staff included two hundred Secret Service agents, a team of six doctors, the White House chef and kitchen staff, four speechwriters, and others to carry on the complex negotiations.

All this may be necessary to ensure the safety and success of the president. It was a complicated operation, but it is insignificant compared to God's greatness as He sits on His throne to carry out His work of judgment.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God's faithfulness and holiness put our sin and rebellion in their true, ugly light (Dan. 9:4-5).
2. Our sin is repugnant, and no one can escape its shame (vss. 6-8).
3. The Lord's merciful forgiveness is our only hope, but it is a glorious hope that we can joyfully embrace (vs. 9).
4. All have sinned, and the consequences are deservedly grim (vss. 10-11).
5. We have suffered no punishments we did not deserve; God is wholly just in everything He does (vss. 12-14).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. When we confess our sins, are we concerned for God's holiness and glory, as Daniel was (Dan. 9:4-5)? Do we pray mostly for our own benefit?
2. In what ways have we failed to listen to God's messengers to us (vs. 6)? How is this evidenced in our lives?
3. Why is there little sense of shame before God in contemporary praying (vs. 8)? Is this something that should cause us concern?
4. How do we embrace the hope of God's forgiveness without taking wrongful advantage of it (vs. 9)?
5. Does God still punish sin in the present life the way He did with the people of Israel (vss. 12-14)? How are things different now and yet still similar?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Made my confession

When a convicted criminal is being sentenced, he is often given an opportunity to speak. Some people remain silent, some protest their innocence, and a few remain defiant.

Some criminals, however, express remorse and seek forgiveness. A young man in Connecticut was sentenced to forty-four years for killing a fellow college student. In his court statement, he took full responsibility for his actions and said he was sorry that he lied, ruined lives, and took his friend's life.

His statement reminds us of the necessity to honestly confess our sins. When we do, we have God's promise of complete forgiveness.

Thy judgments

When the subject of God's judgment is discussed, people tend to accept remarks confined to Bible times. Some people object, however, when it is suggested that God's judgment is happening today or that we should be fearful of coming judgment. In their view, God is either too loving to judge or people are too good to be judged.

True, we know far too little to identify specific events as God's direct judgment, but we dare not excuse sinful attitudes and actions. We should long for broken hearts and people turning from their sins!

Neither have we hearkened

Israel's rebellion was compounded by their refusal to heed the prophets God sent. Second Chronicles 30:10 indicates that when King Hezekiah sent messengers to Israel to invite the people to celebrate the Passover in Judah, many "laughed them to scorn, and mocked them."

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Without authoritative interpretation, visions may provide little insight (Dan. 8:19).
2. Kingdoms rise and fall not of their own accord but subject to purposes they can never guess at (vss. 20-22).
3. We should not be surprised or alarmed at the prosperity of wicked and terrible rulers (vss. 23-24).
4. Evil is given a time to strut, but it will be destroyed in due course (vs. 25).
5. Even with revelation we will not understand all that will take place in God's plan and purpose (vs. 26).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why was it important that Daniel understand what was coming in the time future to him (Dan. 8:19)? Why is such information not routinely granted to us?
2. Why do the prophecies end with long-ago empires and not continue with what happened in later centuries (vss. 20-22)? What were these events pointing toward?
3. By what power, if not “his own” (vs. 24), did the terrible ruler become strong? How does this help us keep things in perspective?
4. How can any ruler be so foolish as to “stand up against the Prince of princes” (vs. 25)?
5. Why was Daniel told to seal up the vision (vs. 26)? What does that imply for our understanding of these passages?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

I will make thee know

A story is told about a church congregation that asked a well-known Bible teacher to come and cover all the prophetic areas of the Bible in a one-day conference. He declined the invitation but added, with a twinkle in his eye, that he knew someone who could do it—a freshman at a nearby Bible college.

And his power shall be mighty

Caleb C. Colton (1780–1832) wrote, “Power will intoxicate the best hearts, as wine the strongest heads. No man is wise enough, nor good enough, to be trusted with unlimited power.” This is clear in Daniel’s vision of the ram, he-goat, and little horn in Daniel 8.

God allowed these men (symbolized in this vision) to gain power and accomplish exploits in order to prepare the world for the promised Messiah.

He shall magnify himself

The Bible declares that “pride goeth before destruction” (Prov. 16:18). A classic example of this truth involves Major General John Sedgwick at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House during the Civil War.

The general was directing his artillery placement. As he stood in full view of enemy sharpshooters, he was strongly urged to take cover, since other men had been hit at that spot.

The major general ignored the warnings. He remarked that the sharpshooters “couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance,” but at that moment, Sedgwick fell dead. He had been killed by a bullet below his left eye.

And so it is as someone has said: “If you think you know it all, you haven’t been listening. Ignorance and power and pride are a deadly mixture.”

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus is still denying Himself for us until we can share His joy with Him (Luke 22:14-16)!
2. Jesus is waiting for us to join Him; let us not fail to remember what He did for us (vss. 17-20)!
3. It is good to examine our hearts lest we do anything to betray our Lord (vss. 21-23).
4. No one is greater than Jesus; if He could serve, we must never think serving is beneath us (vss. 24-27).
5. The reward for sticking with Jesus is far greater than anything we might give up for Him (vss. 28-30).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What fulfillment was Jesus looking for in connection with eating the Passover and drinking the fruit of the vine (Luke 22:15-18)?
2. Why did Jesus connect the bread and the cup with remembering what He did for us on the cross (vss. 19-20)? How does communion help us remember in ways mere words might not?
3. In what ways is it possible to betray the Lord today (vss. 21-22)?
4. What does the timing of the argument over who was greatest tell us about our spiritual condition (vs. 24)?
5. How can many believers shirk service as menial and still profess to honor the One who said, “I am among you as he that serveth” (vs. 27)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

The kingdom of God

Throughout history there have been men who built great empires with a desire to rule the world. Napoleon, who tried and failed, had this to say about Christ: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I myself have founded great empires; but upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this day millions will die for Him.”

How true! Men have experienced great power for a time; but where are they and their kingdoms today? Christ rules the universe, and ultimately all will bow down to Him (Phil. 2:9-11).

Him that betrayeth me

Betrayal is nothing new. In the Old Testament, we can read about kings who lost their lives due to conspiracies. Then there was David, who was betrayed by Ahithophel (II Sam. 15:31). Naboth lost his life due to Jezebel’s scheme (I Kings 21). The New Testament records the ultimate betrayal by Judas.

William Tyndale (1494–1536), who translated considerable parts of the Bible into English, was betrayed by a friend. He was imprisoned in the castle of Vilvoorde, tried (unfairly) for heresy and treason, convicted, then strangled and burned at the stake on 6 October 1536. May God enable us to be ever faithful and true to Christ and those around us.

Among you as he that serveth

In the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest award for civilians. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration.

Our Lord, Master, and King has a higher honor for those who follow His example. It is “The Order of the Towel,” which He demonstrated in the upper room.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We often fail to see the great things God is doing right in front of us (Luke 24:13-16).
2. How foolish we so often are to assume that God is unaware of what we are concerned about (vss. 17-18)!
3. Lack of faith causes us to become disillusioned about things we ought to have been ready for (vss. 19-21).
4. We may be slow to perceive, but the Lord knows how to break through our dullness (vss. 28-31).
5. When we truly encounter the Lord, we just have to tell others (vss. 32-35)!

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you suppose Jesus chose two lesser-known disciples to be among the first He approached after His resurrection (Luke 24:13-15)?
2. Why did Jesus play along with the two disciples' assumption of His ignorance (vss. 18-19)? What was His objective?
3. The disciples claimed to have trusted in Jesus' mission (vs. 21), but their faith was clearly lacking. In what way did it need readjusting?
4. Since these two disciples had not been among the Twelve, why was Jesus' breaking of bread so powerful in bringing recognition to them (vss. 30-31)?
5. If you had been there, would you have hurried back that very night or thought the news could wait till morning (vs. 33)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Communed together and reasoned

Local TV news programs like to begin with “breaking news.” Every radio or TV station wants to be “first with the news.” The need to have breaking news first has caused some reporting to be less than accurate. Years ago a Kansas newspaper had on its masthead, “First with the News—First with the Corrections.”

The two disciples on their way to Emmaus were close to the action in Jerusalem, but they were still confused. Although they had heard about the empty tomb via reports from the women and Peter and John, the idea of a resurrection was hard to grasp. Like careful reporters, they were waiting for confirmation.

Should not know him

From a human and public relations standpoint, one could consider that the resurrection was handled poorly. There was no great publicity—just quiet encounters with ordinary people. Jesus did not seek public acclaim.

Human victories are short-lived. Fame is fleeting. Jesus, however, lives and reigns today in heaven and in the hearts of His followers.

Their eyes were opened

Theologians give reasons as to why the two on their way to Emmaus did not know Jesus. Obviously, it served God's purpose to delay His recognition. They were blessed by His fellowship and explanation of the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:32).

There is a rare condition known as prosopagnosia, or “face blindness,” where a person is unable to recognize faces. Having this disorder must be frustrating; but “spiritual prosopagnosia” would be eternally fatal.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. If we think all our doubts would be resolved if we could just see Jesus, look at the Eleven (Luke 24:36-38)!
2. Jesus shows incomparable patience in overcoming our doubts (vss. 39-43).
3. When we get rattled by the seemingly unexpected, Jesus carefully reminds us of the mission (vss. 44-48).
4. The promise of the Father comes to those who obediently wait for it in faith (vs. 49).
5. Although Jesus is not physically with us now, we are continually surrounded by His presence and joy (vss. 50-53).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the fact that the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost attest to the reality of the resurrection (Luke 24:37)? How might conspirators have written this account?
2. Was the risen Jesus actually hungry when He asked for food (vs. 41)? What was His likely purpose in making the request?
3. Since Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures was not recorded for us, how can we be enlightened as the Eleven were (vss. 44-45)?
4. How well have we been doing in the preaching of repentance and remission from sin in Jesus' name throughout the world (vs. 47)?
5. How was Jesus' ascension—a departure from His people—in reality a great blessing for them (vss. 51-53)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Peace be unto you

“Have a good day!” is a sincere wish, but nobody can *make* it happen.

A good day is every day lived doing the will of God. Jesus greeted His disciples with the typical “Peace be unto you.” He had just risen victorious over sin and death, with the power to confer eternal peace, making it a truly good day for believers.

Terrified and affrighted

The disciples knew nothing about roller coasters, but their emotions took a monster ride that first Easter Sunday.

First, they were devastated by the death of Jesus. There was possibly a glimmer of hope when they heard from the women about the empty tomb.

There was confusion when Peter and John checked the tomb and then sheer terror when Jesus suddenly appeared where the apostles and others had gathered in Jerusalem. Then He spoke, inviting them to touch Him. They did not fully understand, it was all so wonderful, but finally they believed, and the emotional roller-coaster of a day ended with their joyful worship.

The promise of my Father

It has been written, “A man apt to promise is apt to forget.” We can attest to the truth of this statement by observation and experience. We regret the many times we fully intended to do something but realized later that it had slipped from our mind. Our intentions were good; our performance was lacking.

“God is not a man, that he should lie” (Num. 23:19); so when He makes a promise, it is certain that He will fulfill it. The Holy Spirit's coming, promised in Joel 2:28-31, confirmed by Jesus in John 14:16, 26, did indeed happen in Acts 2.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Spirit manifests Himself in the time and manner of His choosing; this may seem surprising and unnerving to us (Acts 2:1-3).
2. The Spirit will always enable us to speak of Jesus (vs. 4).
3. When the truth is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, it gets people talking and asking questions (vss. 5-8).
4. No group is too far from God for the Spirit to reach them with the truth (vss. 9-11).
5. Even a miraculous presentation of the truth will be met with scoffing and skepticism by some (vss. 12-13).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What made the sound of wind and the appearance of fire so appropriate for the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3)?
2. Why was it important that *all* of the disciples be manifestly filled with the Spirit at this time (vs. 4)?
3. Why was it so amazing for the visitors to Jerusalem to hear their own languages being spoken (vss. 5-6)? What fact about the speakers made this so significant (vs. 7)?
4. How did the people of various languages know that the *others* were hearing the words in their own languages (vss. 8-9)?
5. Why should we never be shocked when the world mocks and scoffs at the great things God does among us (vs. 13)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

All with one accord in one place

We may be quick to pass over the first few words of Acts 2; but in the light of Luke 22:24, which mentions the ongoing dispute among the disciples as to who was the greatest, Acts 2:1 has great significance.

D. L. Moody taught, “Before we pray that God would fill us, I believe we ought to pray Him to empty us.”

Between the Last Supper and the Day of Pentecost, God had done a marvelous work in the hearts of each disciple. May He do so in ours!

All filled with the Holy Ghost

Jesus bestowed the Third Person of the Trinity to comfort, guide, and empower His followers for ministry.

In 1926, a wealthy Toronto lawyer left behind an amusing will. He had no close heirs, so he left valuable shares in a jockey club to two men known to oppose betting on horses. The bulk of his estate would go to the Toronto woman who gave birth to the most children in the decade following his death. Four women, each with nine children, became wealthy.

Jesus’ legacy was not a joke or a prank. He provided graciously.

Others mocking said

Ridicule is one of the easiest things to do. Many imagine it is the mark of cleverness and wit, but Anthony Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, wrote, “Nothing is more ridiculous than ridicule.”

Christians and the Christian church have survived over two thousand years of ridicule. Peter effectively answered those in the crowd who were making fun of the Spirit-filled disciples who were speaking the “wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11).

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Lord is gracious to assure us of the blessed future in store for us and for all who have gone before in Him (I Thess. 4:13-15).
2. The Lord's return for us is not something we can possibly miss or overlook (vss. 16-18).
3. Complacency is the most dangerous position for the world to be in (5:1-3).
4. Since we *are* children of light, we are to *live* like children of light (vss. 4-8).
5. Whatever happens in the short term, our permanent outlook is blessed fellowship with our Lord (vss. 9-11).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What fear did Paul's readers have regarding their loved ones who had died (I Thess. 4:14-15)? Why might they have been subject to this fear?
2. What arguments over the timing of the rapture have the potential to distract us from important truths about it (vss. 16-17)? What are those truths? What was Paul's main concern (vs. 18)?
3. Why do so many people still get hung up over "the times and the seasons" (5:1)? What can we do to avoid this?
4. In verses 6-8, what does it mean to "sleep" and "be drunken" and, conversely, to "watch" and "be sober"?
5. How should the fact that we are "not appointed . . . to wrath" (vs. 9) affect our daily living? Does it?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Which have no hope

Gladys Aylward was a missionary in China who led ninety-four children to safety when the Japanese invaded the country. One morning when all seemed hopeless, a young girl tried to comfort her by referring to the story of Moses in the wilderness. Miss Aylward replied, "Yes, my dear, but I am not Moses." The youngster answered back, "Yes, but God is still God!" And God proved Himself faithful by delivering them all safely.

Peace and safety

Satan asked his evil spirits for a plan to hinder people from following Jesus. The first one suggested, "Tell them there is **no heaven**."

Satan said, "That will not do, since most are convinced that a better life awaits them."

The second suggestion was to claim that there was **no hell**.

Again Satan said, "No, that will not do, since men's consciences testify against them."

A third suggestion met with Satan's approval. The demon simply said, "I will tell them that there is **no hurry**!"

The breastplate of faith and love

A New England state promoted a lottery ticket that promised two thousand dollars a week for life.

Its advertising featured humorous sketches of people wearing cumbersome medieval armor in order to protect themselves from accidents so that they could live longer. Obviously, gambling's appeal to greed is effective.

Paul urged believers to wear armor but not so that we could live longer on earth. We are to wear the spiritual armor of faith, hope, and love in order to be protected from Satan (cf. Eph. 6:10-18).

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We can safely ignore false prophets of doom, for we have been given the truth of God (II Thess. 2:1-3).
2. Satan's counterfeit miracles will deceive only those who have refused to love the truth (vss. 9-10).
3. To delight in wickedness is to condemn oneself to delusion (vss. 11-12).
4. Because we have been set apart for glory, we can stand firm in the truth (vss. 13-15).
5. Our encouragement comes not from spurious sources but directly from Christ Himself and the Father (vss. 16-17).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What could have led some believers to think that the day of Christ had already come (II Thess. 2:1-3)? What did their fear involve?
2. Why is Satan allowed to perform signs and wonders to deceive people (vss. 9-10)? What ultimate good is accomplished through this?
3. Is it wrong for God to send a strong delusion to induce people to believe falsehood (vs. 11)? Why is it right for Him to do this?
4. We all took pleasure in wickedness to some extent before we were saved. Why are not all of us condemned (vs. 12)?
5. What are the "traditions" (vs. 15) to which we are to hold firmly? How does the encouragement of Christ and the Father (vs. 16) help us do this?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Satan . . . lying wonders

Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) was an English nonconformist Puritan preacher and author who had the following insight regarding our enemy, the devil: "Satan promises the best, but pays the worst; he promises honour, but pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure, and pays with pain; he promises profit, and pays with loss; he promises life, and pays with death. But God pays as he promises; all his promises are made in pure gold."

Strong delusion

People tend to be gullible in many areas. They often involve themselves in schemes that turn out to be disastrous.

A woman lost her life savings to a swindler. After her money disappeared, she contacted the Better Business Bureau. "Why didn't you contact us first?" the official asked. "Weren't you aware of our services?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "but I was afraid you would tell me not to do it!"

Who believed not the truth

A Christian speaker told of a time when he was speaking on a college campus. After each meeting, one young man would bombard him with questions. It seemed that no matter how he answered, the student would come back with another question.

Finally, the speaker had had enough and asked him point-blank, "If I could give you a perfectly reasonable answer to all your questions, would you be willing to follow Jesus?"

The young man thought for a few moments and finally confessed that he probably would not. Thus, it appears that his real problem was not a lack of knowledge but an unwillingness to deny himself and submit to God's authority.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The world's richest billionaire cannot come close to the inheritance we have in Christ (I Pet. 1:3-4).
2. Any sufferings we might endure now are nothing compared to the joy in store for us (vss. 5-6).
3. Trials are the fire that refines our faith into preciousness beyond compare (vs. 7).
4. It is not nearly so important to see Jesus as it is to believe in Him with joy (vss. 8-9).
5. In Christ we are privileged beyond even the prophets and the angels (vss. 10-12).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the “lively hope” (I Pet. 1:3) that we have been born into? How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ bring about this new birth in us?
2. What salvation will be revealed “in the last time” (vs. 5)? Do we not have salvation now in Christ? Explain.
3. Since gold is a metal that does not corrode, what could Peter have meant in speaking of “gold that perisheth” (vs. 7)?
4. How is it that we can love Someone we have never seen (vs. 8)?
5. What advantage do we have over even the Old Testament prophets (vss. 10-11)?
6. If angels long to look into the truths that have been revealed to us (vs. 12), how can we dare take them for granted? What is our responsibility?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

A lively hope

W. H. Griffith Thomas wrote in *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Eerdmans) that “Faith looks upward, Hope looks onward. Faith accepts, Hope expects. Faith is concerned with the present promising, Hope is concerned with the thing promised. Faith appropriates, Hope anticipates. Faith is always occupied with the past and present, Hope lives entirely in the future. Our life will be weakened, narrowed, and even maimed, if hope does not occupy a very definite place in our life.”

Reserved in heaven for you

The Christian can rejoice even in the midst of severe trials because God's inheritance has been guaranteed by His resurrection power and grace.

An article in the *Kiplinger Magazine* featured a warranty for a piano. The company would repair or replace defective parts—provided the piano was delivered to the factory. The conclusion was that all too often a guarantee is more for the protection of the seller than the buyer.

The trial of your faith

Every Christian faces trials. The South African pastor and writer Andrew Murray (1828–1917) wrote the following words to help him through a trial: “First, He brought me here. It is His will that I am in this strait place. In that fact will I rest.

“Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me the grace to behave as His child.

“Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.

“Last, in His good time, He can bring me out again—how and when He knows.”

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should never complain that the Christian life is too hard; we have been given all we need to live it gloriously (II Pet. 1:3).
2. God has given us His nature; we must live it out in practice (vss. 4-7).
3. To neglect the qualities of the Spirit that we have been given is to inexcusably rob ourselves (vss. 8-9).
4. Living daily in God's power brings assurance that we are really His (vss. 10-11).
5. We will never outgrow the need for reminders of the truth (vss. 12-14).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How do God's promises make us partakers of His nature (II Pet. 1:4)? What is our part in this relationship?
2. How do we add to our lives virtues that can be received only from God (vss. 5-6)?
3. Why does love stand last in Peter's list while it is first in Paul's (II Pet. 1:7; cf. I Cor. 13:13)? Is there any discrepancy here? Why, or why not?
4. What is the spiritual condition of a person who has forgotten that he has been cleansed from past sins (II Pet. 1:9)?
5. How is it possible to make our "calling and election sure" (vs. 10)? Is that within human capacity? Explain.
6. What can we do to refresh each other's memory of the truths we have received (vs. 13)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Given unto us all things

Today's supermarkets can average 46,000 square feet in size and offer an average of 38,718 different items. We can usually find everything we want at the local store.

I grew up in a small town. Sixty-five years ago, our local, 900-square-foot store provided all that we needed. Back then, our mothers cooked more from scratch than from boxes.

Peter declared that God has given every believer all that is needed for life and godliness. He then mentioned seven specifics that are provided to enable believers to be effective servants of the Lord.

Blind, and cannot see afar off

Christ has opened the eyes (mind) of those who have believed. It is possible, however, for one to shut his eyes to what he does not wish to see.

There is an old story about a desert nomad who woke up hungry. He lit a lamp and began eating some dates. He noticed one had a worm in it, so he threw it out. He tried another, but it also had a worm, so he threw that one out. Then, reasoning that if this continued, he would not have any dates left to eat, he put out his lamp and continued eating.

And so it is—many prefer denial and ignorance instead of the truth, continuing in the direction that only causes grief.

In remembrance of these things

It seems that Christians regularly need reminders of previously learned biblical truths. Indeed, much of what we read and hear on Sundays is something we have heard before. There is little that is absolutely new. Even so, sometimes we feel our minds are like a sieve. The information goes in, but it is soon forgotten.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Suffering has the signal benefit of greatly weakening the hold of sin over those who endure it (I Pet. 4:1-2).
2. Those caught in the grip of sin cannot understand why anyone would want to avoid it (vss. 3-4).
3. Judgment holds terror for sinners but life for those who have been rescued from sin (vss. 5-6).
4. Prayer, love, and hospitality should mark our lives in the world (vss. 7-9).
5. Spiritual gifts must be used in service to others and for the glory of God (vss. 10-11).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. If, as I Peter 4:1 says, a person who has suffered “hath ceased from sin,” should we seek out suffering? How could this verse be misused?
2. Why do unbelievers not see the value in being set free from sin and, instead, heap abuse on those who have been (vs. 4)?
3. In what way was the gospel preached to the dead (vs. 6)? Does this imply that everybody gets a second opportunity after death? Why, or why not?
4. In what way does love cover a multitude of sins (vs. 8)? In what way do we want to avoid misusing this truth?
5. What are some practical ways to make sure we use our spiritual gifts to serve others rather than call attention to ourselves (vs. 10)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

Ready to judge

God, the Omnipotent One, is fully capable of justly judging each person in the world.

During 2011, in Connecticut, a man was sentenced to life imprisonment plus one hundred years for the brutal murder of a seventeen-year-old woman. Another man, who had served twenty years in prison for the crime, was released. When he was arrested, tried, and convicted, DNA testing had not been available. Now, the truth was known. The innocent man was released, and the true killer was sentenced.

God needs no DNA evidence. He knows all and will eventually judge everyone with truth and fairness.

Charity shall cover

Even though Benjamin Franklin is not remembered as an evangelical Christian, he nevertheless had an awareness of God. He left us with some wise sayings. He wrote, “I resolve to speak ill of no man whatever, not even in a matter of truth; but rather by some means excuse the faults I hear charged upon others, and upon proper occasions speak all the good I know of everybody.”

Use hospitality

Visiting a church in the Chicago area, we were met by a young woman with Down syndrome. She welcomed us to her church, asked whether we were new in the area, gave us literature, and wished us well.

Here was a church that entrusted a sensitive ministry to one who had limitations but was able to use a smile and a friendly greeting to God’s glory. Many of us with gifts and abilities shirk the ministry of hospitality.

—David A. Hamburg.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should never be rattled by scoffers; they are simply fulfilling Scripture (II Pet. 3:3-4).
2. The willful ignorance of unbelievers keeps them totally unprepared for the coming judgment (vss. 5-7).
3. The Lord operates on His own time schedule; our part is simply to stay ready (vss. 8-10).
4. Attachment to this world is foolish in light of its coming destruction (vss. 11-12).
5. Setting our minds on the new creation will help us be ready for it (vss. 13-15).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the apparent strength of the scoffer's argument against Jesus' coming again (II Pet. 3:3-4)? What is its fatal weakness?
2. Why is such a skeptic not likely to be impressed by reference to the Genesis Flood (vs. 6)? Why does that not matter in the end?
3. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (vs. 8). What is the critical significance of that statement for us?
4. What is the import of the statement that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief (vs. 10)?
5. How can we, on a daily basis, be looking for "new heavens and a new earth" (vs. 13)? What would our lives be like if we consistently did so?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

In the last days scoffers

Every negative criticism of the Bible, God's existence, and Christian faith has an answer. We may not know the answer off the top of our head, or the skeptic may not accept our answer, but we should never back down from truth.

A story is told of a skeptic who claimed that it was impossible to believe in any book (meaning the Bible) whose author is unknown. A Christian asked whether the author of the multiplication table was known. The skeptic said, "No."

"Then," said the Christian, "you do not believe it."

"Of course I believe it," replied the skeptic, "because it works."

"Even so," said the Christian, "the Bible also works!"

By the word of God

Christian apologetics is a challenging study. Few have the energy to pursue it fully, but every Christian has access to the weapon used by Peter and Jesus (cf. Matt. 4:1-11).

Neither defended God's Word. They simply used it. There is inherent power and authority in the Scriptures to change men's minds and hearts (cf. Heb. 4:12).

Charles Spurgeon one time walked into an empty auditorium and tested the acoustics by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He then left, but a man who was working up in the building became convicted and trusted Christ later that day.

As a thousand years

God is eternal and dwells in eternity. Wiersbe wrote that "eternity is not just 'extended time.' Rather, it is existence *above and apart from time*" (*Be Alert, Chariot Victor*).

—David A. Hamburg.