

As we wade cautiously into an unknown 2024, it is good to sum-up our Christian hope and assurance in terms of Paul's confidence that God will indeed triumph for the sake of His church. One key evidence that we can place our present lives and our future hopes, as well as our weakness, doubts, and fears, into God's capable hands is summed up by one key doctrine in Romans 8: Divine Omniscience.

God the Father, Son and Spirit are in the business of "searching our hearts" (Rom. 8:27) in order to forgive, cleanse, renew and help us. Thus all our desires, needs, questions, doubts, fears and troubles are anticipated, understood and acted upon at just the right time by our loving Father. O may we lift our eyes of faith to Heaven and pray with a full recognition of God's power to search our hearts: "Hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, **since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)**" (1 Kings 8:39).

Mon/Tues: Read Romans 8:27**Insoluble Problems**

God knows all about the problems which we consider insoluble; no aspect of Divine omniscience is more comforting. Though our weakness and ignorance yield no solutions, when God brings us low we are led to say: "Lord, you know my weak heart; you know my finite understanding and the weakness of my greatest efforts to obey you. Please, Lord, would you step in and act on my behalf, saying and doing what I in my weakness have failed to say and do." Then His solutions begin to appear.

This then is what it means in the first place for God to "search our hearts" in Romans 8:27: it means that He steps in to do what we cannot; that He delivers us when we cannot deliver ourselves; that He justifies us and saves us from the condemnation we deserve – all because His exhaustive knowledge of us drives Him to just the right action for us in every situation! For example, notice how God the Father provides Heaven-sent aid in 1 Kings 8:39 - not only to forgive us, but to act decisively for us: "Hear from heaven, your dwelling place. **Forgive and act;** deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)."

Meditate and Pray: List some of the insoluble problems that you, your loved ones, or your community are facing. Thank God that He never experiences the impotence which plagues our good intentions. Often we know about a situation and can even read the heart-needs of those involved, yet we remain unable to step into that loved one's life to do what needs to be done. Oh the agony to *know* how someone needs to be helped, and to be *unable* to put our knowledge into action! But God is never powerless. For Him to *know* what we need in omniscient compassion is for Him *to act* on our behalf!

Wed/Thurs: Read Romans 8:1-4

Omniscience that Understands Hearts

What effective omniscience God possesses. God knows how to read our hearts in such a way as to act on our behalf. Think of a needy little child: there times when an exhausted little one cannot even put her needs into words... and isn't that just when a loving mother steps in to say: "I know just what you need. Here is some food, a bath, and pajamas! Now go to sleep!"

Well, there is nothing which more profoundly exhausts the believer than to try in his own strength to keep God's law. There is no place where we are more exposed in our impotence and weakness – and even naked shame – than in our inability to keep God's law. That is why Romans 8:3 is such good news: "What the law could not do; God did... by sending His own Son." In the same way, Peter seems to compassionately recognize our need for an omniscient God in just this area of failed law-keeping. Listen to what he says in answer to the legalistic Judaizers (whose harsh spirit still harasses the church today) who in Peter's day were insisting that Gentile Christians undergo circumcision:

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. **Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?**¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." Acts 15:6-11

Meditate and Pray: What sweet liberty from man-made rules are found in Peter's wise words. This Apostle has been taught by God to know and understand the human heart! From his own failed experience, Peter knows that the religious efforts of the arm of flesh will never avail. And notice one more thing: It is because God "knows the hearts" of saved sinners in Acts 15:8 that He takes upon Himself the job of purifying their hearts by faith through grace. How does the Psalmist put it?

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. Psalm 103: 13-16

**Fri/Sat/Sun: read Romans 8:22-39
Treasured**

Known, Owned, and

God's intimate knowledge of our every situation and need is a tremendously reassuring theme in the Scriptures. The reason Paul knows that God's love will hold us in every trial and danger that he lists (v. 35-39) is because he understands and believes in God's complete knowledge of every situation we will ever face. The reason Paul is sure that "all things will work for our good" (v.28) is that he trusts the Holy Spirit to knowledgeably carry our unspoken prayers to the All-Seeing Father (v. 26-27) and because he knows the Son's Heavenly intercessions (v.34) arise from the Son's exhaustive sympathy with our every weakness. In short, because God knows ALL things, He can make them all work together for the good of those called to believe and be saved.

But let us never fail to trace all such saving knowledge of our every need back to Christ as the chosen prophet, priest and king whose ongoing official duty is to mediate for us before God's throne with a perfect knowledge of our human plight. He Himself as a man was tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. It is, above all, Jesus' job to read our daily heart needs and to respond accordingly. As Jesus Himself says about His thorough knowledge of us as our Good Shepherd:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. **John 10:11-15**

Ponder and Meditate: Sing about our Shepherd's omniscient compassion for us in all our weakness, using the words of hymn # 647:

*How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.*

*It makes the wounded spirit whole
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul
And to the weary, rest.*

*Dear name! The Rock on which I build,
My Shield and Hiding-place;
My never-failing Treasury filled
With boundless stores of grace.*

*Jesus, my Shepherd, Guardian, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.*