

## RARE COLLECTIBLES OF THE FAITH

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"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8).

People who have no hobby often become bored with their existence. They have no enthusiasm about anything and never appreciate the zest for living. Individuals who collect stamps, rocks, and coins are always seeking new specimens for their collections. As an adult I became interested in seashells and searched everywhere for new and valuable species. The late King Farouk of Egypt had a large collection of matchboxes, and many wealthy people have a love for antiques and art. I have friends who collect ceramic forms of owls and snails, and others who exhibit interest in all kinds of collectibles. I knew a man in South Africa who collected cats; he had a hundred, and I always wondered how the neighbors tolerated the miniature zoo that existed on the other side of the garden fence. The apostle Peter was interested in a different kind of collectible. He valued spiritual realities and urged his readers to increase what they already possessed. He wrote, "And beside this, add to your faith, virtue... knowledge... temperance... patience." The fact that he encouraged his friends to add these things, suggested they did not already possess them; their collections were incomplete.

#### Faith

This is the beginning of any spiritual collection, for without it we have nothing. There are degrees of faith, for the Savior spoke of no faith (see Mark 4:37-40); little faith (see Matt. 6:25-30); and great faith (see Luke 7:1-10). Without true faith in Christ people remain dead in trespasses and sins, and lifeless people do not collect anything. Peter, introducing his letter, said, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith, through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). His readers had been indifferent until the grace of God transformed them. Then, they "obtained like precious faith." Peter's converts acquired something not previously possessed. Their experience was not the result of an emotional upheaval, nor something

189

obtained through self-effort. They had been changed by the kindness and mercy of God, taken the first step in Christian experience, and received their first jewel. The apostle, who was a man of great knowledge, urged them to seek other treasures in order to increase their collection.

#### Virtue

The new relationship with Christ transformed their conduct; their actions should reflect the teachings they had embraced. Virtue would express inner serenity, the fruit produced by the indwelling Spirit of God. Faith without virtue would be meaningless. Paul mentioned Hymenaeus and Alexander, whose confession apparently was only an intellectual idea (see 1 Tim. 1:19-20). Doctrines that do not produce virtue are stillborn!

It is noteworthy in regard to these collectibles, Peter on five different occasions mentioned "these things" (see 1 Peter 1:8-10, 12, 15). The apostle believed that a barren life would be as unattractive as the fig tree that disappointed Christ (see Matt. 21:19). When the Lord spoke of the vine, He outlined three stages of fruitbearing: fruit, more fruit, and much fruit (see John 15:1-5). Webster's New

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International Dictionary describes virtue as "a specific excellence; any good quality or merit; excellence in general." The Savior was the embodiment of virtue, and therefore it may be assumed that faith in Christ will increase likeness to Him.

### Knowledge

Wisdom is never superlative except in God. It is an unexplored area of understanding. Fellowship with Christ promotes an intense yearning to know more about Him. Knowledge is a rare collectible which, unfortunately, is not possessed by everybody. There are two areas where this treasure may be sought.

(1) The Written Word of God. The Scriptures supply everything needed for victorious living. The Bible reveals many invaluable truths, but the greatest is the revelation that Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to redeem sinners. It is essential that everybody should know more about Him. Yet, however wonderful that knowledge may be, to know Christ personally is even more desirable.

(2) The Living Word of God. Paul was devoted to the cause of Christ, and his knowledge of the Savior was unsurpassed, but as a mature saint, he wrote: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but

190

loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:8-10). There is a great difference between knowing about the Queen of England and being her personal friend. The same truth applies to a relationship with the King of Kings. Knowledge is a treasure of incalculable worth.

### Temperance or Self-Control

Faith, virtue, and knowledge point to God, but patience indicates attention is being directed to human conduct. The desire to please God is one thing; to do so is another. The human sanctuary is not always as clean as it should be, and there are occasions when alien residents reside within the holy place (see Neb. 13:6-7). When Jesus went into the temple of God, He saw pollution, greed, and thieves, and He expelled the offenders. He said, "it is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (see Mart. 21:13). The money changers never voluntarily left their tables. To maintain the sanctity of the human soul, resolution and determination are required to put aside "all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1 Peter 2:1). As discipline is found in the life of a soldier, so self-control and temperance must be evident as a Christian struggles against evil.

### Patience

This is one of the most desired gems in any spiritual collection. It involves trust and is best seen in Job, whose patience was severely tested in the problems that devastated his life. The patriarch endured until he emerged victoriously. The writer to the Hebrews urged his friends to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). It is relatively easy to maintain trust when circumstances are favorable, but the task becomes difficult when life is overwhelmed by failure and frustration. When God seems reluctant or slow to answer prayers, faith is challenged, and people become weary and despondent. Job said: "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Rare collectibles are often discovered in unlikely places.

191

Godliness

For several years I was an avid collector of seashells and possessed thousands of specimens of all colors, shapes, and sizes. I knew their Latin names, the location and depth of water in which they were found, and my search for special treasures was ceaseless. I regularly sent parcels to overseas collectors, and there were occasions when I either found or received new gems. A lady with whom I often exchanged specimens sent me a special shell which at that time was one of six in the world. I proudly displayed that specimen in my cabinet. Similarly, when Peter mentioned godliness, he referred to a rare commodity, a treasure not often found in the lives of men and women. To see it in radiant Christians is an experience not easily forgotten. My friend Mr. Bottomley who lived in Melbourne, Australia, was asked by a little girl, "Mr. Bot, are you God?" He replied, "No, sweetheart, but I'm trying to be like Him." Rare gems are not obtained easily.

Brotherly Kindness

Some of the most valuable items in any collection are not beautiful, and some of the attractive specimens are not rare. The list of collectibles supplied by Simon Peter illustrates that fact. It is a saddening fact that the media thrives on unpleasant stories. If a citizen does something bad, denunciations are printed and circulated. If a man does a special act of kindness, little if anything is ever mentioned. People take things for granted and often forget to return thanks for help received. The Savior came to earth to help everybody, and Christians should emulate His example. It has often been said, "Actions speak louder than words, and one kind deed may be worth a hundred sermons." The first act of the church after Pentecost was the formation of an administration capable of feeding the hungry and giving shelter to the homeless. John expressed the doctrines of the church when he wrote, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Within the early church donors gave of their possessions and never asked if recipients deserved a gift. They gave without question, and great grace was upon the assemblies. Simon Peter lived in a world dominated by Roman greed where many victims became like their conquerors. The soldiers took whatever they desired; self-

192

ishness dictated their conduct. When the followers of Jesus sacrificed to assist less fortunate brethren, the world saw moral excellence that was rare. Nothing can be more admirable than affection that embraces all people. If that were practiced internationally, wars would cease immediately. A helping hand is better than advice; kindness is more to be desired than orations. Peter urged his readers to add this to their collection.

Charity.. . Love

The thirteenth chapter of the first letter sent by Paul to the Corinthians is probably one of the best-known parts of the New Testament. There the apostle endeavored to explain the reality of Christian affection. He reached a glorious climax when he wrote, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13). Life and language have two extremes. Vocabulary mentions murder, vice, cruelty, envy, malice, bitterness, greed, jealousy, strife, and bloodshed. People who exhibit such char-

#### RARE COLLECTIBLES OF THE FAITH

acteristics are never popular. As a contrast, there are gentleness, kindness, goodness, sympathy, charm, beauty, affection, assistance, and grace. All who possess these attributes are admired people.

Love is not jealous of a rival's prosperity and never broadcasts news of another's failure or disgrace. It hides what threatens a good reputation. Love seeks ways to assist and asks nothing in return. It pardons but never pouts; it beautifies but never besmirches. True love emanates from God, for He is love. Peter urged his readers to add it to their spiritual collections. Earthly treasures are either sold or bequeathed to relatives or friends. The jewels mentioned by Peter enrich their owners through time and into eternity. If men are willing to spend enormous sums of money to increase their perishable assets, Christians should heed Peter's advice to acquire spiritual gems. The psalmist said, "For when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away" (Ps. 49:17). The Savior was very wise when He said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

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