

Knowledge and Truth

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Paul wrote, “We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” (1 Cor. 8:1-2) Religion – man-authored attempts to define and know God – would have us believe that *what* we know is what is important. But Paul here tells us that *how* we know something is of equal, if not greater, importance. We must not overlook that sin and death entered the world when Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil. (Gen. 3:5-7, Rom. 5:12, etc.) Knowledge and sin and death are intricately linked and are not suddenly foreign to us just because we’ve been introduced to Jesus.

Yet knowledge obviously remains a valid tool. Even in this instruction, Paul intimates that knowledge can be known as one “ought to know” and elsewhere speaks of having one’s mind spiritually renewed from God so as to be able to know what the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” is. (Rom. 12:2) Peter writes that we will not lose our steadfastness in Christ if we will remain careful and watchful to “grow in the grace and *knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 3:17-18) And Jesus Himself said, “If you abide (remain) in My word (teachings, sayings, directives), you are My disciples indeed. And you shall *know* the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn. 8:31-32) Obviously, knowledge – when rightly gained and rightly held – has a very real place in the life of a follower of Christ and God!

When we compare Jesus’ statement here with some other statements made in the New Testament, we can begin to sort out the differences between the knowledge that puffs up and the knowledge that leads to truth and life. John wrote, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and [you know] that no lie is of the truth... If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father... The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you, but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.” (1 Jn. 2:20-21, 24, 27) We find here all the same elements that are in Jesus’ statement above – abiding, knowledge, truth and liberty.

Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit of truth would come and teach them all things (Jn. 14:26) and lead them into all truth. (Jn. 16:13) When Paul tells us to take up “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17), many wrongly suppose he is referring to the written pages of the Bible. Nothing is further from the truth – when he wrote that, there was no “New Testament” as we know it today. Further, the Greek word that is used to link the modifying phrase “the word of God” to its object cannot refer to the sword but instead refers to the Spirit. That is, *the Spirit* is the word of God! This is an important distinction to make, to say the least.

Men who have gleaned their New Testament knowledge from other men may protest that Jesus is the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-4, 14, etc.) – assuming that they themselves have gone beyond the grasp of the error that the Bible, the Book, is the Word of God (see Heb. 4:12-13), which is usually only the method by which a man wields the words of God so as to be his own “God.” This *is* how far knowledge gleaned apart from the Spirit of truth can lead someone astray. This *is* the path the Pharisees took – knowing the right things to say and believe but doing the works of their true father, the devil. (Mt. 23:3, Jn. 8:44) The “theology” which separates the three Persons of the Godhead triunity into three different people with three different agendas is

perhaps the quintessential example of knowledge held apart from the leading of the Spirit of truth. And while many will deny they adhere to this fallacy, their actions speak louder than their words. Being unable to recognize that the Spirit of Christ and God is the Word of God as much as Jesus Christ is the Word of God is merely one such action.

The person who thinks they already know something is probably the hardest person to reach with truth. Their opinions – whether from misinformation, superstition or even “theology” and denominational “doctrines” (teachings) – sits like an iron dome around their heart and mind, most often rendering them entirely impervious to “new” truths from God’s Spirit. When such a person reads phrases like “contrary to the doctrine you have learned” (Rom. 16:17) or “We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us” (1 Jn. 4:6), immediately assumes that the writer is speaking of the reader’s pet doctrines or denominational enclave. But that is precisely *not* what Paul and John have in mind – in fact, it is *opposed* to what they have in mind!

How has it come to be that the vast majority of people who claim to belong to and follow Christ hold notions, ideas and beliefs that are in actuality contrary or even antagonistic to the truths of Christ? At its root must surely lie the reality that the vast majority think they know things but yet do not know anything as they ought to know it. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. (Prov. 23:7) When any of us glean our “truth” from any man – even men led by the Spirit of God as were Paul, Apollos, Peter or even Jesus (1 Cor. 1:12, 3:4) – we are partaking of carnal (fleshly, contaminated) knowledge. Such knowledge can only puff up its possessor.

Love – divine, self-sacrificing agape – rejoices in the truth. (1 Cor. 13:6) Speaking the truth in love is an indicator of genuine spiritual maturity. (Eph. 4:13) Speaking one’s opinionated beliefs in arrogance and pride – especially that pride of religious superiority over one’s fellow human beings – is a sign that one’s knowledge is merely carnal, perhaps even demonic. (1 Tim. 4:1) Such a one, no matter how many followers he has gathered to himself, is merely a deceiver guiding souls toward hell – no matter how many words he reads and speaks from the Bible! In this time of deception, we must take care that *no one* deceives us. (Mt. 24:4) The only way to do that is to be led into all truth by the Spirit of truth. (Jn. 16:13)

Let he who has ears hear.

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