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The Essentiality of Knowledge



The Scriptures are replete with verses that emphasize how the believer must be characterized first and foremost by love. Love is essential and preeminent! A close second to love is the believer’s lifetime pursuit of knowledge. In fact, Proverbs calls those who are lacking in knowledge *simpletons*, whereas those who have knowledge are called *wise*.

A public servant can be neither unloving nor a simpleton if he wants to be a good witness for Christ, as well as be effective in office. This study will seek to develop and further enhance the importance of the pursuit of knowledge in the life of the believer.

Read on, my friends,

Ralph Drollinger

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♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

Proverbs 22:17–18

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips.



Don't let anyone lead you into thinking that the Christian life does not include a hearty pursuit of knowledge—as if the pursuit of mastering God's Word is less than spiritual.

The Essentiality of Knowledge

I. INTRODUCTION

The primacy of *love* over *knowledge* is underscored in 1 Corinthians 13:1, wherein the great apostle states, *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* Elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 8:1b (NKJV), Paul concludes similarly. In comparing *knowledge* to *love*, he states *knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.* For sure, *knowledge* as a personal pursuit should take a back seat to the priority of *love*. *Loving* our Savior and *loving* others must be the primary pursuits of the believer's life. But having stated that rationale, we cannot conclude that to be in a constant pursuit of *knowledge* deems a person to be *unloving*.

II. THE FALSE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

An important clarification is in order relative to the tension between *love* and *knowledge*: in stating the preeminence of *love* over *knowledge*, to assert that someone who is *knowledgeable* and in the pursuit of *knowledge* is therefore somehow less than *loving* is improper. To diminish the importance of *knowledge* relative to spiritual maturity in favor of only being *loving* is to do a public servant a great disservice.

In fact, I was recently with someone who said he thought that one of America's greatest theologically conservative seminaries was more of a "cemetery" than a "seminary." Such thinking serves to make the point that this tragic mindset is ever-increasing in American Christianity today. To illustrate this point metaphorically:

Can you say that someone who eats an enormous breakfast each morning is an overeater when he is preparing to compete in the Tour de France?

In a spiritual sense, the mental preparedness, the gaining of *knowledge*, is quite essential for any important kingdom assignment, such as serving Christ in city, county, state, or national government. In fact, nutrition is a prerequisite for performing with excellence. So don't be misled by those who would have you diminish your pursuit of *knowledge*, especially *knowledge* of God's ways per His Word! The believer in office, or any citizen for that matter, can be both *knowledgeable* and *loving* at the same time. Those who pursue *knowledge* are not necessarily *unloving*; to say otherwise is to propagate a false dichotomy.

III. THE UNDERLYING MOTIVES OF GAINING KNOWLEDGE

The appropriateness or otherwise sinfulness of the pursuit of *knowledge* depends largely on motives. As previously stated from 1 Corinthians 8:1, *knowledge* can *puff up*, meaning it can be the pursuit of a proud heart in order to appear superior. However, as stated in the previous point, *knowledge* can be equivalent to preparedness.

In the book of Proverbs, the word *knowledge* appears 40 times and is always related to and descriptive of a wise person.

Proverbs 1:22 states in this regard:

"How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?"

In Proverbs 1:28-29, *knowledge* is directly related to finding God:

"Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD."



These passages are but two of the many that characterize the pursuit of *knowledge* in a positive light. Accordingly, the underlying motive for gaining *knowledge* is often a determinative factor as to whether or not it is a holy pursuit. If we possess the right spirit of glorifying God, building His kingdom, winning the lost to Christ, and being a preserver and illuminator in culture, then our quest for *knowledge* is undoubtedly a wonderful pursuit that is both God-honoring and God-blessed!

IV. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS DEPENDENT ON KNOWLEDGE

Perhaps the most powerful way to illustrate the point being made here—that the Bible teaches that our faith in Christ must be cognitive as well as *loving*—is to examine the three biblically identified stages of the believer’s spiritual growth as listed in 1 John 2:12-14. What is contained in this passage illustrates the proposition that *knowledge* is extremely important to the Christian’s life and growth in Christ! In fact, without the pursuit of biblical *knowledge*, there will be no maturation in Christ. Carefully observe how each of the following stages of spiritual growth is dependent on *knowledge*:

A. SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF 1 JOHN 2:12-14

¹²*I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake.* ¹³*I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.* ¹⁴*I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

The following chart is an attempt to sort out the twice repeated, three distinct stages of spiritual maturity as delineated by the Apostle John in this passage. Observe what titles John places on each: *little children*, *fathers*, and *young men*. Think of John’s communication style here to be similar to someone’s painting a wall with two separate coats in order to obtain the desired outcome:

Growth Stage	Characterized by	Verse(s)
CHILD	Sins forgiven You know the Father	v. 12 v. 13
YOUNG MAN	Overcome the Evil One You are strong The Word of God abides in you	vv. 13–14 v. 14 v. 14
FATHER	You know Him who has been from the beginning You know Him who has been from the beginning	v. 13 v. 14

In John’s biblical analogy of physical maturation to spiritual maturation, the Greek words used to describe the believers’ stages of growth are not intended to relate to their physical age, but rather to their spiritual maturity. Again, keep in mind the overall point for delving into this exercise: each of these stages of spiritual growth relates to and are dependent on *knowledge*! With this foundation in mind, look more closely at each of the three stages:

B. LITTLE CHILDREN OF THE FAITH

Little children are saved, but they only possess a rudimentary understanding of God: “Jesus *loves* me! This I *know*, for the Bible tells me so!” accurately depicts their very minimalistic level of understanding of salvation. Children possess limited biblical *knowledge*. Nonetheless,

they possess enough biblical *knowledge* to be genuinely saved as compared to an unsaved person who does not possess this saving *knowledge*.

Satan can and often does wreak havoc on *little children* because they have little knowledge of his wiles.

Christian cults often target *little children* in the faith because they are tenderhearted toward spiritual matters but very naive. Ephesians 4:14 is descriptive and admonishing to infant believers:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the

trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.

Spiritual babes, this passage states, should not remain in such a state of infancy. They should not remain naive or unknowledgeable of the *winds*, *trickery*, and *craftiness* that have the potential to make them highly unstable as newborn babes in Christ. In opposition to those who say that *knowledge* in the life of the believer is unimportant or of lesser importance, this passage points to the opposite: Scripture says *knowledge* is absolutely critical to spiritual maturity!

C. YOUNG MEN OF THE FAITH

Young men are those who, while not yet having walked with God over a longer period of time and gotten to *know Him* (as is the case with a *father* who has experienced the truths of His Word firsthand),



do *know* sound doctrine (in contrast to the *child* of the faith). Young men are strong against sin and error because *the word of God abides in* them, which is synonymous with having *knowledge* of His Word. Per the descriptors given of a *young man* in this passage, this believer, via his *knowledge*, has *overcome* the deceitfulness of the *evil one*.

D. FATHER OF THE FAITH

The *father* of the faith is the one John depicts as the most spiritually mature; he has a deep, abiding *knowledge* of the eternal God. John twice states that he *knows Him*. This descriptor is commensurate with Philippians 3:10, wherein the Apostle Paul states regarding himself (as a *father* of the faith), *that I may know Him....* Accordingly, the following is true:

The height of spiritual maturity is to *know* God in His fullness via His Word, as well as the firsthand *knowledge* of having personally experienced the truths of His Word in our lives.

V. SUMMARY OF THE THREE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

All three of the aforementioned stages of spiritual growth are related to commensurate *knowledge*. The point again, that which makes this passage worth mentioning at length, is that one can only become a *father* in the faith and have profound intimacy with God by first becoming a believer, who herein is termed a *little child* in the faith. The *little child* then grows to become a *young man* by being *strong in the Word*, which implies obtaining *knowledge*. From this vantage point he becomes a *father in the faith*. Proverbs 22:17b is a fitting summation: *apply your mind to my knowledge*.

VI. CONCLUSION

Herein lies the biblical case for the noble pursuit of *knowledge*: in a nutshell, *knowledge* is tantamount to spiritual maturation and God's glorification! Biblical and vocational *knowledge* is extremely important, foundational, and critical in the life of every believer and especially those who serve in leadership. Proverbs 3:3 states very fittingly that both *knowledge* and *love* are essential to the life of the believer:

Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

Accordingly and importantly relative to spiritual growth, don't let anyone lead you into thinking that the Christian life does not include a hearty pursuit of *knowledge*—as if the pursuit of mastering God's Word is less than spiritual. No!

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