

Introduction:

- Is knowledge possible?
- What are the obstacles to knowledge?
- What are the sources of knowledge?
- What is the nature of knowledge itself?
- Is our knowledge valid, certain, justified?
- What are the basic theories of truth?

I. The Bible says that knowledge is existential and experiential.

- Knowledge as detached, objective facts and information vs. a biblical view of knowledge that is personal in character and involves the knower with the object known in an intimate relationship.

II. The Bible says that knowledge is a function of the whole person, centered in the heart.

- What we know affects what we love and do.
- What we love affects what we know and do.
- What we do affects what we know and love.

III. The Bible says that knowledge is covenantal, that is, we must obey what we know.

Matt. 7:24 ¶ "Therefore everyone who **hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them**, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. ... Matt. 7:26 "And everyone **who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them**, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.

Matt. 28:20 **teaching them to observe** all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "

John 13:17 "If you know these things, **you are blessed if you do them.**

James 1:22 But prove yourselves **doers of the word**, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

In discussing epistemology, or views of knowledge and knowing, with my intro to philosophy students, we address basic questions like these:

- Is knowledge possible?
- What are the obstacles to knowledge?
- What are the sources of knowledge?
- What is the nature of knowledge itself?
- Is our knowledge valid, certain, justified?
- What are the basic theories of truth?

In considering these issues, the students figure out rather quickly that there is more to human knowing than human knowing will ever know!

In an effort to integrate faith with learning, not only do I attempt to offer Christian perspectives on each of the questions I just mentioned, but I also present to the students a biblical epistemology, setting before them two characteristics about knowledge from a Scriptural point of view, a point of view that distinguishes knowledge from what many people normally think it is.

We as professors would be wise to consider what the Bible has to say about knowledge, since much of our work is epistemological in nature, and much of our time is spent trying to get across what we know to students.

So let me share with you these two traits about knowledge from a biblical perspective, the same two points I share with the students.

First of all, the Bible says that knowledge is existential and experiential.

For many people today, knowledge is primarily information, data, or facts. It consists of abstractions and theories that have been gathered by an objective, detached process that is supposed to insure its validity and accuracy.

The goal of teaching is to transfer those facts, that data, and that information from the full head of the teacher to the empty head of the student, the so-called **jug to mug** theory of teaching.

Teaching is primarily information transfer.

But Scripture offers a richer account of knowledge.

The basic biblical words for knowledge mean to know by experience, including an experience or knowledge of such things as suffering/affliction, disease/illness, joy/gladness, peace/love.

The main words for knowing in both the OT and NT also designate sexual relations between husbands and wives: Adam knew Eve, Joseph knew Mary after she gave birth to Jesus, and so on. To know implies intimacy and relationship.

Hence, knowledge according to the Bible is not abstract or theoretical in character; it is not merely objective data or sterile information or a set of detached facts.

It implies a relationship of significant care, concern and closeness between the knower and the thing known, just as spouses know and care for each other.

Knowledge means an in-depth encounter and experience with God and with existence itself, with creation in all its forms — natural, social, cultural.

Knowledge is something that is concrete, personal, solid, real, meaningful, regardless of subject area.

This it seems to me is the way in which we ought to know our own disciplines.

The way for example, Steve Holcomb knows conducting, or Philip Mitchell knows literature, or Aaron Son knows the NT.

And this ought to influence the way we teach our disciplines to students.

They ought to come to know them, not just as a set of facts, data, or information to be transferred to their minds, but in terms of a genuine relationship of engagement, encounter, care, and concern, a relationship with a subject area that has the potential to change their lives.

Acc. to the Scripture, therefore, true knowledge is existential and experiential in character.

Second, the Bible says that knowledge is covenantal.

For many people, knowledge incurs very little sense of responsibility or accountability to do what they know or become what they know.

After all, if knowledge is just data, facts, information, then the goal of knowing is primarily information, fact, and data mastery, not character formation or responsible action.

In other words, people have little if any sense of a connection

- between epistemology and ethics,
- between what they know and how they live,
- between truth and life.

But a biblically based covenant epistemology emphasizes the connection

- between knowing and doing,
- belief and behavior,
- convictions and conduct,
- between learning and living.

Specifically, the Bible teaches that the purpose of acquiring knowledge is not for knowledge itself, but to foster obedience to the covenant that binds God and His people, Christ and his church.

The NT is replete with passages that make this connection.

Matt. 7:24 ¶ "Therefore everyone who **hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them**, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.

Matt. 7:26 "And everyone **who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them**, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.

Matt. 28:20 **teaching them to observe** all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "

John 13:17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

Indeed, knowledge is covenantal.

As my friend Steve Garber wrote in his book, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, "Knowing and doing, hearing and obeying are integrally connected for people whose convictions are truly and deeply Christian."

Over the years I have introduced several books to students that develop these ideas in powerful ways:

Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*

Parker Palmer, *To Know as we are Known: A Spirituality of Education*

Mark Schwehn: *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*

Conclusion: So what then is a biblical epistemology?

- In Christian perspective, knowing is existential and experiential in character.
- It is a function of the whole person as God's image centered in the heart.
- It is covenantal in character and requires us to do what we know.

There is indeed more to human knowing than human knowing will ever know. But with the help of Scripture, we have deeper insight and wisdom into what it means to know from God's point of view, for his glory, and for our benefit.

Prayer.