

The Arrogance of Knowledge

Knowledge of God's word is a good thing, and we should strive for more of it. But like any useful tool, that knowledge can be destructive if not used wisely.

*"It is not good for a soul to be without knowledge" (Prov. 19:2).
"This crowd that does not know the law is accursed" (Jn. 7:49).
"Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies" (1 Cor. 8:1).*



Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32). It follows that if we do *not* know the truth, we will find ourselves in sin's grip. History provides ample evidence of this reality. The leaders of ancient Israel ruled poorly because "they do not know, nor do they understand" (Psa. 82:5). Jeremiah saw his nation go into captivity because the people were "dull-hearted, without knowledge" (Jer. 10:14). God lamented, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Clearly, seeking knowledge of God's word should be high on our priority list.

Knowledge is essential, but like any instrument of good, it carries an inherent risk if it is not used carefully. Even as we grow in knowledge, Satan can use that knowledge as a back door to sneak destructive attitudes and behaviors into our lives.

Example #1: When the ecclesiastical rulers in Jesus' day looked out at their fellow citizens, they saw only an accursed "crowd that does not know the law." Their insights into the law, earned through years of study, had become a license to look down upon their fellow

citizens with contempt. Ironically, the very thing the law was intended to achieve—helping the people improve their lives—was short-circuited by a haughty spirit among those who had a deeper knowledge of that law.

Example #2: The church in Corinth was troubled by the question of meats that had been sacrificed to idols. Could they eat it or not? Some of the Corinthian Christians understood that the idols were figments of human imagination; consequently, the meat was nothing more than food that could be eaten without consequence. But exercising that liberty would place a temptation before their weaker brethren whose consciences were still conditioned by years of practice to see eating the meat as an act of worship to a pagan god. In this case, Paul saw knowledge as a potential problem: "Because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" (1 Cor. 8:11).

In both instances, the lack of knowledge was a problem; but the *presence* of knowledge posed an even greater problem. It fed a spirit of snobbishness that lost sight of the larger purpose that the knowledge was intended to serve. Knowledge of the Scriptures became a pathway to pride.

As the Son of God, Jesus knew more about God's truth than anyone. Yet when He encountered crowds of ordinary people who did not know the law, He did not belittle them as ignoramuses. Instead, He "was moved with compassion for them, . . . [and] began to teach them many things" (Mk. 6:34). He was wise enough to know that they needed help, not condescension. He used His knowledge to lift them up, not put them down.

Solomon observed, "it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge." That's true, and we ought to do everything we can to promote more personal Bible reading, group Bible studies, and Bible memorization. But if, in the pursuit of that knowledge, we turn into insufferable holier-than-thou elites, we will have undermined the very thing the Bible was intended to instill within us. In the end, our "knowledge" will become the cause of our destruction.

Paul's summary of the problem ought to worry us: "Knowledge puffs up" (or "makes arrogant," NASV). Is my Bible knowledge equipping me to serve others with a deeper sense of compassion, or is it feeding a sense of superiority over others?

— David King