

Tests Of True Knowledge

Knowledge Puffs Up

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The dangers confronting us are not always the same. There are different types of personalities, different interests, and different emphasis in our lives. For example, we are well aware of the dangers that confront the activist. This is the type of person who lives on his energy and on what he does, who is always busy organizing something, and who says that you must always be doing something.

There are terrible dangers that are inherent in that kind of activism. We should see the dangers associated with an almost exclusive emphasis on life, living, and activity at the expense of doctrine, understanding, growth, and wisdom.

But while we may see these dangers so clearly there is a real possibility of our being unaware of an entirely different type of danger that confronts us and that is something that applies to a different kind of individual. This specific danger threatens those who study the Holy Scriptures as a secondary study to the secular and various philosophical writings. These types of people are in danger of pride of intellect and pride of knowledge.

Increased knowledge has the effect of enabling and encouraging pride. Everyone carries with him a certain amount of pride of intellect and pride of knowledge. The apostle Paul expresses this problem with human reasoning this way in II Timothy 3.

II Timothy 3:7 Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Now let us consider this subject that knowledge puffs up in the context of what we find the apostle Paul saying in I Corinthians 8.

I Corinthians 8:1-3 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

Now how do we apply this to ourselves? There is no need to take the time in dealing with a particular context and state of affairs in the church of Corinth at this time other than to say that Paul is dealing with the question of meats offered to idols because it was causing division in the church but the principle involved relates to all false knowledge.

There were brethren who thought of themselves as more enlightened and there were brethren who had less understanding. In this case they did not see eye to eye, there was conflict. Now the problem Paul was dealing with was that some of the more intellectual brethren were relying on their own human reasoning which was a mixture of truth and error.

They reasoned that since there was no such thing as another god, and since there was only one God they believed the idea that you should not eat meat offered to idols. They correctly reasoned that a Christian was free to eat any clean meat that he liked, however some of them went so far as to say that, if asked, they would even go to the heathen festivals.

It would be like going to a Christmas festival and saying, “It’s not really a celebration to any god.” Because of this they were becoming a stumbling block to the weaker brethren, whom they looked down on and even in some cases despised.

Because of the weakness in their intellect, their lack of grasping the truth, and their deficient understanding of biblical principles, the intellectuals looked down upon those of lesser understanding. There was serious trouble in the congregation in Corinth because of this conflict between the enlightened man of knowledge and those who were weaker and lacking in knowledge.

The exact context is very interesting, but we are concerned with the very interesting way in which Paul deals with it, and as is his style, he does not deal with the issue directly. Paul reveals a great principle with regard to this whole question of knowledge.

The real trouble in Corinth was not exclusively regarding the question of meats offered to idols, but rather people's view of their own knowledge. So he discusses the matter primarily in terms of their attitude toward knowledge. The principle that we can extract from I Corinthians 8:1 is the danger of a false view of knowledge.

To be accurate in the context of the passage, let me clarify that the knowledge Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 8:1 is not the same as that referred to in I Timothy 6:20, where he talks about some who have gone astray and have made shipwreck of the faith because of “science falsely so called.” “Science” there means knowledge and “knowledge falsely so called” is another translation.

I Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

Now that is not the same knowledge as we saw in I Corinthians 8:1. There the problem has reference to a kind of spiritual or mystical knowledge and to people claiming that they were receiving some sort of direct knowledge by inspiration. It was the danger of false mysticism or spiritualism.

But here in I Timothy 6:20-21 it is knowledge in the sense in which we normally use the term to refer to learning through experience or study. Verse 20 is another instance of Paul critiquing the false teachers and their thinking.

The false teachers may flatter themselves by labeling their teachings as knowledge, but since they reject the truth their teaching cannot be true knowledge, rather it is the knowledge of the world drawn from wrong conclusions about what is seen or heard. Darwinism is a prime example of this false knowledge, as is Greek philosophy.

There is no need to emphasize the fact that knowledge is all-important and we can never know too much, unless the knowledge overshadows the truth of God's inspired written Word. Knowledge is essential and doctrine is vital.

The Bible is full of doctrine, as you well know. The epistles are powerful, glorious expositions of doctrine and truth. The apostles not only preached the truth but they emphasize the all-importance of the knowledge of the truth. So knowledge was and is important to us.

I Timothy 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This is God's desire for us, to come to that knowledge. So knowledge is important and something that we must have, but it has to be the right knowledge.

Ultimately most of the troubles in the church, according to the teaching of the epistles, stem somehow or another from a lack of knowledge and understanding leading to a misapplication of doctrine. Knowledge therefore is in and of itself absolutely essential, but it *must* be true.

It is possible for us to develop a false view of knowledge. It is possible for this gift of knowledge and understanding, that is in many ways God's most precious gift to us next to the gift of His Son and our salvation, to become a snare and a very real danger in our spiritual life if we get off onto secular knowledge, or worldly knowledge, in place of God's truth.

The apostle Paul got very upset with the Corinthian congregation because, although they had a knowledge of God's truth, and knew what was sin and what it was not, and they obviously knew the commandment concerning adultery, but even still the whole congregation tolerated a great, willful, and flagrant sin within the congregation.

There had been some bad behavior that resulted from relying on mere fashionable knowledge as a guide in religious matters among the Corinthians and it was prudent of Paul to remind them of this. These pretenders, to unusual wisdom, had given rise to factions and disputes. Paul reminds them

that it was not safe to rely on mere popular knowledge as a guide, that is knowledge from the pop culture or what we call “political correctness.”

Even here in the greater churches of God, we hear about brethren and even some ministers who are going along with political correctness and turning toward Protestantism. Now we will read I Corinthians 5:1-6. The caption here is “immorality defiles the church.”

I Corinthians 5:1-6 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

They were proud of their tolerance of sin which they justified, by human reasoning, that they should be forgiving of the unrepentant sinner. Pride contaminates the whole person and the flagrant sin in the midst of their congregation did not cause them to feel guilty but it did cause them to become prideful and puffed up of the humanly reasoned knowledge.

They smugly thought that they could be more forgiving and therefore more righteous than God by taking it upon themselves to allow this unrepentant, sexually immoral person to remain in the church. Paul immediately picked up on their motives and realized that this sin was causing foolish members to swell with vanity and become puffed up and they felt good about their tolerance of a great sin in their midst, even though they were defying the keeping of God's law.

This tolerance and acceptance of the serious sin was motivated by their prideful attitudes. They believed they knew better than God how to apply His own commands. Although the apostle Paul sometimes speaks of a healthy

pride that we should have in ourselves, the word “pride” in Scripture is more frequently used to refer to a very negative character trait that can be described as presumptuous, arrogant, and conceited.

Even classical Greek and Roman cultures have a particular aversion to pride stigmatizing it as hubris, making virtually all their literary tragedies a variation on the theme of the self-destructive effects of pride. Its devastating effects were seen even by the unconverted Gentiles.

Likewise in the Bible, such pride brings disgrace and this is what happened to the Corinthian congregation. Notice how the Proverbs perfectly describes what was happening to the church of God in Corinth.

Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.

Pride also breeds quarrels.

Proverbs 13:10 By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Pride also goes before destruction.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride also brings humiliation.

Proverbs 29:23 A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.

That is the key to having the proper knowledge and knowing what it is. Pride or humility, that is the great difference between an understanding of truth. Is it false or true?

Just a small amount of leaven—a sinful person by analogy—can cause the whole lump of dough (the whole church) to become saturated with sin by accepting the great flagrant sin in their midst and they share in the guilt.

Permitting sin to continue unabated and openly before the whole congregation would, in time, cause others to gradually let down and begin to slip back into former sins. As a result, sin would spread in their lives and in the lives of other Christians by the bad example of just one person, as a little leaven causes the whole loaf to rise and become puffed up.

Now I am not speaking of allowing people to attend who have sinned, but who have repented and have been forgiven. I am talking about those who flagrantly commit great sins in the congregations and remain there without anyone saying anything about it.

Paul therefore commanded the Corinthian church members to put out the flagrant and spiritually sinful member of their congregation so that the church might be spiritually unleavened.

Now they had the same arrogant attitudes that the progressives in the U. S. have today in their tolerance and funding of the murder of little children, known as abortion, which they deceitfully call a woman's right. They claim that anyone against abortion hates women. This is a prime example of calling evil good and good evil. The Corinthian church was guilty of a similar attitude.

Isaiah 5:20-21 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

That attitude is the direct line to false knowledge. Now look at the obvious degeneration of morality and the continual breakdown of law and order as the leaders of the world do whatever they want and encourage people to do the same.

Religiously, the “green” movement is more earth worship than anything else. Socially, the re-engineering of society to where homosexuality is accepted as a way of life. We are told many times in Scripture that homosexuality is something that God will give the death sentence to.

Economically, massive thefts by banks. Scientifically, genetic engineering, where they are ruining the food and changing it to such an extent that it causes cancer in not only lab rats, but also humans who are eating it. Medically, forced vaccination. California passed a law recently that requires forced vaccinations.

Militarily, depopulation by nuclear, chemical, and bio-weapons. Educationally, changes in what constitutes marriage and family regarding homosexuality, pedophilia, polygamy, and bestiality. Entertainment, flagrant occult symbolism and rituals in children's shows, sports events, books, and movies. This world is thoroughly saturated by the mind of Satan.

As ancient Israel was declining morally and collapsing economically and politically, Isaiah was warning the people that the godless of society were leading the whole nation astray by its perverted values. Evil, for example: adultery, idolatry, Sabbath breaking, materialism, murder, sacrificing children to the god of sex, and many others sins forbidden in the Scriptures, is often upheld as being good. Those who say such things are under the threat or “woe” of God's judgment.

Now let us look at the causes of a false view of knowledge so that we can avoid such things.

The first general cause of this false view of knowledge is of course Satan. Obviously at the back of everything is the Adversary.

Satan, having failed to keep us out of the faith and in the state of ignorance and darkness, seeing that we have discovered the danger of a busy activism, suddenly completely changes his tactics. Transforming himself into an angel of light, he drives us to such an extreme in this matter of knowledge, eventually ensnaring us just as successfully as he ensnares the activist.

In other words we are back to a phenomenon with which we are all so familiar: the danger of going aggressively from one extreme to the other, the danger of over-correction, the danger of being unbalanced spiritually.

What seems to be the harassing sin of mankind is that there is nothing as difficult as to maintain a balance. In correcting one thing we go to such an extreme as to find ourselves in an equally dangerous position. Saul did this before his conversion. Paul writes this of himself in Galatians 1.

Galatians 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

He was extremely unbalanced in his approach prior to his conversion. We are always confronted by Satan, who is always ready to turn good things into his own instruments of unrighteousness and cause us to miss the mark.

The second general cause is a little learning, as a well known proverb reminds us. There is danger in a great deal of knowledge, but there is danger that arises from a little learning. It is well known that first year students 'always' know much more than final year students. So even a little knowledge puffs up.

Now let us move on to a specific cause: intellectual interest. This cause takes a purely theoretical and academic interest in truth and knowledge. It makes knowledge an end in and of itself and it is a purely theoretical and academic approach.

There are always some people who analyze Scripture in a similar way to the historians and commentators, who read and write about philosophers like Plato and Socrates. Their humanist approach is from a literary, historical, and mythological curiosity. We will read II Timothy 3.

II Timothy 3:5-9 Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women

loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

Paul focused on the specific situation in Ephesus. It was from the increasingly large group in society who displayed the characteristic in verse 5, that the false teachers had emerged to plague the church. Their methods were insidious and they would worm their way into homes and gain control over those they knew were vulnerable and gullible.

In the case of Ephesus the false teachers had crept in and gotten a foothold by a group of weak-willed women to begin with, who were literally heaped with sin and fed by various lusts.

Paul connected false teaching with moral deficiency and their carnality and immaturity rendered these easy targets for the false teachers. Out of the so-called “openness to learn” they evidently embraced, as a fad, whatever new heresy came along.

Their problem was that they had very little understanding because they were not close to God in faith and obedience, and could not recognize the truth when they saw it. The churches of God today have had many such people wreaking havoc on weak and novice members.

Some of these people who are predators on the weak approach truth purely in terms of intellect and there is nothing more dangerous as to isolate the intellect. Human beings should never be thought of as nothing but an intellect. Humanism is based solely on human reasoning and on the intellect.

Now this belief in the sole power of intellect will lead a person directly to this false knowledge about which the apostle Paul was speaking. It is a purely intellectual interest in truth in which the heart is never engaged at all and the power of the truth is not felt. In this case feeling does not enter at all,

it is strictly an intellectual academic knowledge. They do not apply it in their lives or try to teach anyone else how to apply it, rather it is just strictly knowledge.

The intellectual is merely concerned about absorbing knowledge with his mind and it is precisely the same when the will is not engaged. The heart must be engaged when it comes to true obedience rather than just giving lip service. Also humility must precede submission from the heart.

Romans 6:17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

Obedying from the heart requires faith. Humility precedes obedience because it is an acknowledgment of another's authority over us. Humility leads to submission to God in Christ.

Paul is speaking of that form of doctrine that was delivered to the seat of your mind, there you have intellect and heart together. If you isolate the intellect and leave out the heart and the will, it is certain that you will end in this position of having a false view of knowledge. Without faith and without a relationship with God it is impossible to have an understanding of true knowledge.

In other words this danger is of knowing about the subject, rather than knowing and living it. The knowing and the application of knowledge go hand in hand. There is a huge difference between preaching about the gospel and preaching the application of the gospel. Both are needed.

It is possible to preach around the gospel and say things about it without ever really presenting it so that it may be applied in life. Preaching *about* it is useless and can be very dangerous. It may be true of us that we know about these things but do not really know why or how to apply them.

The danger is that if we hear of the truth, we see it, and we understand it intellectually, then we are held accountable for what we know. So these

people out in the world who understand the Bible intellectually are held accountable for those things even though they have not applied them in their lives.

This becomes all-important when we realize that the whole end and object of God's truth is to know God, not a collection of abstract truths or a number of philosophical propositions, but to actually know God, the only true God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, the moral conditions of spiritual knowledge are continually insisted on, while the pride of intellectual knowledge is condemned. Proper knowledge must be joined with the will of God.

John 7:16-18 Jesus answered them and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine [there must be effort, activity applied in our lives], whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory [pride]; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.

So the heart of a person, which is symbolic of the will of the mind, determines whether a person thinks and speaks from the motivation of seeking his own glory or if he thinks and speaks from the motivation of seeking to glorify God. This is the best test of whether a person speaks true knowledge with humility or not.

Now what are the signs and indications of this condition of false knowledge? There are certain general signs that expose this possession of false knowledge and reveal when a person has a false view of knowledge.

For instance, in such cases there is always a lack of balance, as I mentioned earlier. It is the bit of knowledge that a person has that he is always interested in and he winds up caring about nothing else. It becomes an obsession, so immediately there is a lack of balance. We have to be careful of this in our Bible study, that we do not obsess so much on something that we cannot see anything else. God is not going to reveal everything. He reveals things in time.

For example, a person has been subtly attracted by a type or aspect of knowledge and goes after it. He acquaints himself with it and knows nothing else and is lopsided and lacking in balance. That in turn expresses itself in the use of slogans, clichés, tabloid expressions, and phrases which always characterizes this condition. These phrases keep tripping off the tongue that is unfailingly indicative of a little knowledge, a lack of true knowledge, and above all of this lack of balance of knowledge.

The apostle Paul uses the term “puffed up.” “Knowledge puffs up.” What an expression! What does he mean? He is describing a proud person, a person who thinks he really knows it all and in his mind he is not like as other people, he knows something more. He is a man of knowledge and understanding and a great reader. How do we know that he is proud of his knowledge? Well, he is always parading it.

His way of speech is a part of the parading, which is inevitably one of the manifestations of being puffed up. It also manifests itself in an impatience of any restraint and any correction, still more an impatience with an opposing view. It is intolerant of anything else, it knows better than anyone else, and no other suggestion is tolerated. No opposing view has a right to exist and is not even considered.

In other words, it is a part of his being puffed up. The arrogance may be subtle and this is sometimes seen in false modesty which reeks of hypocrisy.

It is interesting that the apostle James warns that everyone should not try to become teachers. It was kind of a surprise to hear James say that in James 3.

James 3:1-2 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

What a terrible thing it would be to have a church with nothing but masters and teachers in it, with all being authorities and all of them knowing everything about everything.

But there is always this tendency to feel that we do know and understand it all and human nature wants its own intellect to be known. So people who are puffed up are arrogant in and of themselves and thereby betray themselves. They claim or seize the limelight without justification, but still more serious is the way in which this manifests itself in its attitude toward others in contentions, resentment, and even bitterness.

That was the trouble in the church in Corinth. These men thought they were enlightened and they said “we have knowledge, we know!” The apostle Paul's reply was: “We know that we all have knowledge.” Their attitude toward others was one of superiority, they tended to despise others and they were very similar to the Pharisees.

They did not boast as much about their good works as they did about their knowledge and their understanding. These others who did not understand, who are not clear about idols, were almost beneath contempt to them.

So they looked down on them and were inconsiderate towards them and said they were hardly worth to be considered at all. Often it shows itself like that, or it shows itself by just ignoring these others of less understanding altogether.

These Gnostic types, or humanists, despise the weak and uneducated to such an extent that they do not even feel contemptuous toward them because in their view, the weak have nothing to offer and so are not there at all.

It is interesting that this is how academia treats Jesus Christ today, as if He was not there at all. Those in the know are so far up in the clouds that they do not even see the novices to God's truth or the less educated, it is as if they were not even there.

The apostle Paul had to deal with the influence of Gnostics who were having a negative effect on the church, and the church is still threatened by people trying to advance their Gnostic deceptions. So I think it is important that we look a little closer at what they promoted.

Gnosticism is a system of false teaching that existed during the early centuries of Christianity. Its name came from the Greek word *g nosis* which

means knowledge. The Gnostics believed that knowledge was the way to salvation. For this reason Gnosticism was condemned as false and heretical by several New Testament writers.

What I find interesting about this gnostic teaching, or movement, is it still exists today but the wording has changed. So instead of hearing that the Gnostics believe that knowledge was the way to salvation, we hear that by knowledge through knowledge you can ascend. Have you ever heard that word in movies, TV shows, or read it in books, that people ascend? That is what they believe, the more knowledge they can acquire the more likely they will be to ascend to a higher level.

The Gnostics accepted the Greek idea of a radical dualism between God—that is spirit—and the world—that is matter. Now according to their worldview the created order was evil, inferior, and opposed to the good. According to them, God may have created the first order but each successive order after that was the work of the anti-gods or a subordinate deity.

The Gnostics taught that man is composed of body, soul, and spirit. Since the body and the soul are part of a man's earthly existence, they are evil enclosed in the soul. However the spirit is the only divine substance of man and this spirit is asleep, ignorant, and it needs to be awakened and liberated by knowledge.

According to the Gnostics, the aim of salvation is for the spirit to be awakened by knowledge so that the inner man can be released from his earthly dungeon and return to the realm of light where the soul becomes reunited with God. As the soul ascends, however, it needs to penetrate the cosmic spheres which separated it from its heavenly destiny. This too was accomplished by knowledge and one must understand certain formulas which are revealed only to the initiated.

There is an active movement now among the scientific community to try to find the “God particle.” They believe that that it will open the door to the spirit world. They are trying to do that scientifically and spending millions, if not billions of dollars to push that. It is a scary type of fooling around with technology and science.

Now note that the Gnostics believe that the soul must ascend and this belief of ascension to a higher plane by the accumulation of certain knowledge is one of the driving doctrine behind the elite's occultism today. This occultism was seen in the 2012 Super Bowl halftime show when Madonna ascended out of the stage.

Now the reference to the rise of the phoenix out of the ashes from Greek mythology is seen increasingly in advertisements, movies, sports, public education, and various forms of entertainment including software games and heavily promoted books.

Ethical behavior among the Gnostics varied considerably. Some sought to separate themselves from what they declared as all the evil matter in order to avoid contamination. The apostle Paul opposed all of these kinds of Gnostic views.

I Timothy 4:1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

So for other Gnostics ethical work took the form of libertinism. For them knowledge meant freedom to participate in all sorts of indulgences. Many reasoned that since they had received divine knowledge and were truly informed as to their divine nature, it did not matter how they lived. We see that in society today. It is being promoted worldwide by the elite occultism and by other factions in society as they reengineer society to accept such things as homosexuality and other horrible things.

Several times Paul reminded the members of God's church that you were saved from sin to have your fruit to holiness. They were not to have an attitude of indifference toward the law. They had died to sin in their baptism into Christ and so were to walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? [That is what the elite of today say.] Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Now turn to I John 3. John reminds us that when we have been saved we are not to continue living in sin. However, many Gnostics believe that they are at liberty to sin in their bodies as long as they do not sin in their minds. Many in mainstream Christianity have willingly accepted this false doctrine and we are seeing it begin to flow into the greater churches of God.

I John 3:7-8 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness [he who practices or applies it in their life, meaning actual application] is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

I John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Those who are of God and those who are of Satan are distinguished by what they practice, both in their minds and bodies, and in how they treat other human beings. Gnostic teachings also had a disruptive effect on the fellowship in the church. Those who were enlightened thought of themselves as being superior to those who did not have such knowledge.

Divisions arose between the spiritual and the fleshly and this attitude of superiority is severely condemned in the New Testament. Christians are one body who should love one another. Spiritual gifts are for the Christian community, they promote humility and love within the church.

Ephesians 4:11-16 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

So love is required to speak the truth, without that love truth cannot be spoken, at least not in a way that is usable. If truth is spoken without that love then it is useless. Humility and love are such important aspects of character that without them there cannot be unity.

Prideful attitudes manifest themselves in believing that these other people who are slower to learn are a hindrance. These people who think that they know so much would like to move on to the greater theological things.

But ministers always include in their message some preliminary basic principles for the weak and novices. The prideful will only tolerate what they consider to be spiritual meat, but both are needed for balance. Some people complain that a minister is too basic or has not titillated their minds well enough. Because of that, the prideful believe that they are being held back and cannot go on to great intellectual heights.

Oftentimes those who consider themselves as intellectuals do not have any common sense. They do not know how to apply even the simplest of principles of God. We see examples of this in the colleges and universities where the professors who have all of this knowledge and intellect that they teach but their lives are a mess.

Those who fancy themselves as people of knowledge and intellect want to move on but their attitude shows that they think they are being held back by others and resentment festers against the organization, the ministers, or brethren who, in their mind, are slow to understand. In reality we are all slow to understand God's truth and it is impossible to understand any of God's truth without the Holy Spirit.

Now the last sign that I am going to mention before I move on here, is that in some cases this wrong view of knowledge and this possession of what is not true knowledge manifests itself by its victims not doing anything at all. It produces no spiritual fruit, he simply just enjoys his knowledge. He does not seem to be aware of the fact that there are people who need God's truth desperately.

He spends all his time reading and when he meets people he lets them know that he has been reading and studying about truth, but has no interest in them. There are some prideful people who never have any contact with the world at all. They do not seem to be aware of the existence of the problems of mankind and the ravages of sin. Why not? Because they spend all of their time arguing about their wealth of knowledge on any given subject and display it to others.

In reality this makes them completely useless and entirely cut off from any kind of productive activity. I am talking about the extreme here of course. Each of us should examine himself for similar attitudes. It is a very easy thing to do to spend most of your time just reading, adding to your knowledge, and forgetting all about the sinful world in which we live, or forget about the caring and praying for our fellow brethren.

We all look for escapes from the world but we should never hide our heads in the sand. It is the distinctive temptation that comes to people of intellect

and ability to have realized the importance of knowledge. But we must never forget that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, without it the wrong knowledge is sought. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, this is a foundational principle. If that has not been reached, then a person's knowledge is useless.

You can spend all of your life merely adding to your own knowledge or in comparing notes with others who are like yourself, but if your knowledge is not used to enlighten and help others, then your knowledge is vain and useless.

Now we come to the third section here which is the uselessness of such supposed knowledge. Look at the way the apostle Paul puts it here in I Corinthians 8.

I Corinthians 8:2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

“If anyone thinks that he knows anything.” Paul says, “Well there’s only one thing to say about them: he knows nothing yet as he should know,” Which means that this man, who is proud of the knowledge that he thinks is his, does not really have any knowledge at all. Paul is talking about the person who thinks that he has a knowledge of God but all he has is some kind of knowledge *about* God.

Sadly this is what we see in a great way in Protestantism today. It is not a knowledge of God, otherwise He could not possibly be what He is. Any knowledge that falls short of a knowledge of God does not interest Satan at all because it is not really true knowledge that is going to make a difference to you. Satan is only interested in the knowledge that makes a difference to you. That is why he tries to pervert the truth.

Let me offer, as evidence, another reason. Why is this such a ridiculous position to be in, this feeling that we really do know and that we have knowledge? Why is this pride in ourselves and this despising of other people who do not know any doctrine or theology, so absurd? Why is it so ridiculous to treat those weak people of whom the proud speak of in a derogatory manner and whom they more or less dismiss so terribly? And

why is it not a real knowledge? Well, the answer is because of the vastness of the knowledge.

Now what I mean by that is, the knowledge about which we are speaking is a knowledge of God. It is the fear of the Lord. All these doctrines in Scripture are about God and the moment we realize that we see how impossible it is for a man to be proud of his knowledge, because we feel so minute.

The longer we are in the church and the more we learn and understand, the less we feel we know. The moment he realizes the endlessness and the vastness of the knowledge, he is bound to realize that he is but a mere beginner, a little child paddling at the edge of the ocean. He thought he was out in the great depths of knowledge, but he knows nothing about them and he has been thinking in purely theoretical terms.

When you realize that all this knowledge and everything in the Bible is meant to bring us to know God, the everlasting, the Eternal in the glory and the majesty of His being, that is the whole purpose of all teaching concerning these matters, how can we possibly feel that we have knowledge and be puffed up and boast of our knowledge and our learning in these matters?

Or take the way Paul puts it in writing to the Ephesians. He is praying for these Ephesians and he bows his knees before God the Father, Why?

Ephesians 3:18-19 [that they, speaking of the church] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Even simply, in one sense, the love of Christ surpasses all knowledge. That is impossible for us mere men to understand.

Now let us consider the tests that show whether we have this true knowledge or not. First and foremost obviously is the love of God, as the apostle puts it in I Corinthians 8.

I Corinthians 8:3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

So God looks at that as a part of knowledge. Paul says in effect, if anyone loves God, that is knowledge. In other words here is the argument: to truly know God of necessity is to love Him. You cannot know and understand God without loving Him, it is impossible. Why? Because God is love is who and what He is. If anyone really knows God he will be lost in awe and reverence of and devotion to God and he will desire to live the same way God does. Most of all he will love God. True knowledge always leads to a love of God.

If we therefore cannot say that we love God, have we any right to claim any knowledge of God? We can have a great deal of knowledge about Him and concerning Him, we can even comprehend God's plan of salvation, but we still may be ignorant in knowledge of God.

John 17:1-3 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

So eternal life is not only that we may know God but it is also that we may know His way of life and live it in order to really know it.

Another way to test knowledge is by the character it produces. “Knowledge puffs up,” says the apostle Paul, but love edifies or builds up. What kind of character does it build up? It is described perfectly here in I Corinthians 13.

I Corinthians 13:4-10 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will

vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

That is the character true godly knowledge produces. All the worldly knowledge that we have now, as valuable as it may be to us now, will be dwarfed into insignificance and rendered comparatively valueless in comparison to the overwhelming magnificence of God's Kingdom and His way of life.

The knowledge that we have now is as valuable as the gift of prophecy, or as the power of speaking foreign languages is valuable, but the secular knowledge we have will be lost in the brighter visions of God's Kingdom. Paul also mentions something similar in his illustration in verse 12.

I Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

What we believe and what we are acquainted with now, we imperfectly and incompletely understand. There are many obscurities and many difficulties, but in that future existence we will know distinctly and clearly, then the knowledge that we have now will appear so dim and so obscure that it will seem to have vanished away and disappeared.

What are His characteristics? Most important is love and humility. This is produced by fearing God, by reverencing Him. Look at those faithful men in the Bible who have had a glimpse of God—they fall down as dead. They say with Isaiah, “Woe is me, for I am undone!” Were they proud of their knowledge and their learning and their superiority? No, not at all. They felt that they were unclean and unfit to be in God’s presence; that they were not in a position to criticize anybody because they were so aware of their absolute inadequacy.

True knowledge invariably leads to humility and also to holiness and godliness. Christ advocates humility of mind, not childishness of thought. With this type of humility comes childlike trust, not childlike, ignorant simplicity.

What about our attitude toward our neighbor? Paul stated it perfectly there in I Corinthians 13, “we must love our neighbor.” Jesus Christ Himself said that “it is the second greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself,” and this is especially so if he is weak and ignorant.

What if he does not understand God's way of life? How are we to treat him? Are we to despise him or dismiss him as a fool, someone who knows nothing? Is that to be the attitude? Of course not. To sum it up, what is the result of true knowledge? It is that we love and rejoice in the Lord.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

The happiest people in the church are those who know the doctrines and live God's way of life—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, not just weekend Christians. We must not allow ourselves to be puffed up with our little knowledge. We should be people filled with joy because we know God and His love.

I John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Truly knowing this humbles us and puts us in awe of God's love and mercy and we are to be filled with compassion for the weak and ignorant. Also we must have a holy zeal for God's name and resulting from that have a great reverence and respect for everything linked to that name. That does not mean to become a ‘sacred name’ person. It means that when we think of God and all the names and titles that He has and their meanings, that we reverence them, that we do not just shrug them off.

May God forgive us for our tolerance of flagrant and willful sin and our intolerance of the differing personalities of the brethren that often results from false knowledge. And also for the arrogance and presumptuousness that is so often displayed.

We can produce fruit that shows we know God, by not only loving God but by loving our neighbor, especially the weak and frail, and the novices in the faith. The young and those who are slow to learn let us learn to be patient with them even as God is patient with us with our little knowledge.

How are we to get this knowledge? By formal and personal Bible study? Obviously we start there and add self-examination. In order to apply that knowledge we have to look at ourselves and see how it impacts us, what we need to change. Of course there is prayer and fasting as well.

It is absolutely essential that we analyze and search out our flaws. How foolish it is to think that we already know all we need to know about God's way of life, that we have a knowledge of God simply because we have acquired a certain amount of intellectual, theoretical, and academic information.

That is not enough. We must grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. This means that we must actively apply the true knowledge of the inspired written Word of God in our lives daily. What is the value of all the knowledge we have if we are ignorant of that? Here in II Corinthians 13, Paul writes:

I Corinthians 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

We all have knowledge and we know the nature of sin, however mere knowledge is not a safe guide. Its affect may be to puff up, to fill with pride and self sufficiency and to lead us astray. Love, as well as knowledge, must come as a guide and will be a safer guide than mere popular secular knowledge.

Mere knowledge or science, when the heart is not right, fills with pride, swells a person with presumptuous self-confidence and reliance in his own powers and very often leads him entirely astray. You cannot trust mere intellectual accomplishments, abstract science, nor the mere development of the intellect. However, knowledge combined with right feelings and pure

principles with a heart filled with love of God and fellow humans, can be trusted.

Unless the heart is developed with love and humility the effect of knowledge is to make a person a mere scholar and to fill him with prideful ideas of his own importance and by this to lead him into error and sin.

If we are to receive the gift of eternal life and become members of God's Family, we must prove our willingness to obey God here and now. He knows that in order for us to overcome sin and obey Him we need His spiritual help, so He promises us the power of His Holy Spirit. We will end here in I Corinthians 2.

I Corinthians 2:10-16 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

We have the mind of Christ which enables us to receive spiritual instruction, to receive true knowledge directly from God through Jesus Christ. We have a direct line where knowledge comes directly to us.

May God help us to fear and revere Him, to be humble, and have love for one another, and then our knowledge is true and of great value.