

Mightier Than The Sword (Part Nineteen)

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In last week's commentary, I introduced you to a small portion of the philosopher's life whose works truly rocked the entire Western world. Other philosophers' teachings were certainly damaging, but this man's works truly hit a devastating blow to what passes in this world as the Christian religion.

Today, I may be introducing you to a new word, or at least acquainting you with it. It is a technical word and is new in the sense that it has only existed since 1854. The identity of the man who coined it fully known and it is known when he did it. It is highly unlikely you will ever use it but it is fairly important to the field of philosophy.

The word in English is "epistemology." It is derived from the Greek language in that the roots that form the word, *episteme*, which means "knowledge," and another Greek word you are much more familiar with, *logos*, which means, "speech" or "word."

This word is important to philosophy because there is a very real and perhaps even supremely important difference between merely being acquainted with certain knowledge as compared to knowing how or knowing that regarding the same knowledge.

I know that sounds quite vague because you aren't involved in philosophy as a philosopher. But this vague distinction is very important to wisdom and therefore making the right and good uses of knowledge, and at the same time, using this same distinction to also avoid making poor and perhaps even deadly uses of knowledge.

Merely being acquainted with a fact is generally unimportant. We are acquainted with the fact that a person can balance and therefore successfully ride a bicycle. That illustration describes mere acquaintance knowledge. It is knowledge that is true and is easily accepted as a truth.

However, we do not have a grasp of all the detailed physics involved that produce a successful bicycle ride. That is an area in which a physicist may shine in order to make that knowledge available for successful understanding and therefore practical usefulness.

The area in which the philosopher is involved parallels that of the physicist except that the philosopher's field of expertise is supposed to be that of human behavior, ethics, morals, and ways of life in order that life may be lived successfully. Now we are getting into dangerous areas.

With that background, I am going to give you a quite simple definition for epistemology: It is the study of what is true and how one determines what is true.

Riding a bicycle is nothing in terms of importance, but how one behaves is *very* important.

My opening explanation was long because I felt I had to provide an illustration we could all easily relate to. We can relate to riding a bicycle. But there is a vast difference between balancing the bicycle, with which everybody is merely acquainted, as compared to the work of the physicist who truly understands why it can be done by means of the truth of laws working for our benefit. Do you know the laws enabling you to ride a bicycle and balance it? You don't. That is how unimportant it is. You just do it. But in terms of behavior, this becomes very important because the wages of sin is death.

The philosopher's place is essentially the same as the physicist's but in an entirely different field of endeavor. A philosopher searches to do, teach, and explain so spiritual, moral and ethical truths can be understood, project what the result will be, accepted, and put into practice for the benefit of mankind. God does this in the Bible. Hang on to that.

The physicist, using human reason and already-understood truth contained in natural laws, labors to experiment and find in some form of laboratory, to prove his reason and calculations. It is right here the philosopher runs into a major obstacle. The physical laws the physicist uses are consistent. They

never change. Except in rare instances, they are absolutely dependable to act and react in the fashion they were designed to because that is the design the Creator God built into them. Thus, those laws can always be trusted.

Physicists depend upon consistency of natural laws to confirm their calculations. This is very important to this subject. By comparison, whenever a philosopher wants to develop a theory of knowledge regarding human behavior, he too must seek an ultimate authority since there must be ultimate standards against which all claims of truth he makes must be tested.

The philosopher needs standards that are as unvaryingly consistent in the field of human behavior as the natural laws used in physical science. For the Christian, the standard is God and His Word. The God of Christianity is nothing less than the God above all gods, the Authority above all authorities. It is the Creator God who establishes what is true in every area of human behavior.

However, every one of these philosophers that the world considers great, regardless of his ethnicity, rejected the same God who created the consistent and dependable laws that operate in the physical realm, and at the same time rejected His spiritual, moral and ethical laws regarding human behavior. In other words, they became humanists. Thus, they became the highest authority available, and thus, their epistemology—their search for truth, why it is true, and what it will produce—became flawed.

Proverbs 14:12 is true: There is a way that seems right, but the end thereof is the way of death.