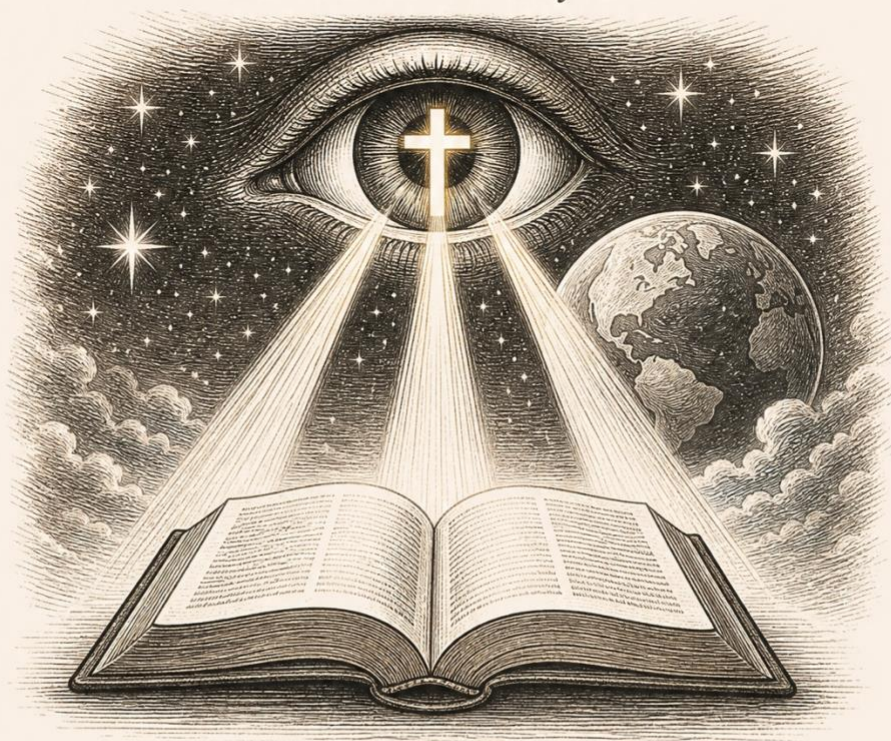


The
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EPISTEMOLOGICAL
THINKING
—◆—
for —◆—
CHRISTIANS

*What We Know, Whence We Know It,
and How Far We May Know*



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Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D

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Christian Philosophy & Apologetics

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The Epistemological Thinking for Christians

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DEDICATION

*“Now we have received not the spirit of the world,
but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand
the things freely given us by God.”*

— 1 Corinthians 2:12

*To every Christian student and scholar who has wondered whether faith and reason
are friends or foes.*

*This study is an invitation to think God’s thoughts after Him, to love the Lord
with all the mind, and to give a reason for the hope that is within us.*

Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface

Epistemology, from the Greek *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (study), is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. It asks the most basic questions a person can ask. What is real? How do we know? How much can we know? These questions are not the exclusive property of professional philosophers. Every person is already doing epistemology: every child who asks, “Is that true?”, every scientist who designs an experiment, and every Christian who says, “I believe.”

The Christian faith has an epistemological foundation. We do not believe blindly. We believe on the basis of testimony, evidence, revelation, and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. God Himself calls us to reason: “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD” (Isa. 1:18). Paul commands believers to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Peter urges us to honour Christ the Lord as holy and to be “always prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).

I have taught these truths for many years, and I have found that believers are often more afraid of the mind than they need to be. Some suppose that to think hard is to doubt, and that to doubt is to sin. Others suppose that to believe is to switch the mind off. Both suppose that faith and reason are enemies. I have come to the opposite conviction. The God who gave us the Scriptures also gave us minds, and He intends the one to serve the other. My prayer is that this study will help you love the Lord with all your mind, and that you will find in these pages both humility and confidence.

I write for several readers. I write for the student who has been told that the Christian faith cannot survive in the university. I write for the teacher and the pastor who wish to give sound answers to hard questions. And I write for the plain believer who senses that something is wrong

with the way the world thinks, but who cannot yet say what it is. None of these readers needs to be a philosopher. Each of them needs to know that the God who saves is also the God who makes sense of things.

In this study I survey the major philosophical traditions of human epistemology and evaluate them in the light of the one epistemology that is from above: the knowledge and wisdom that God Himself has revealed. I have arranged the study around three questions. What is the nature of knowledge and wisdom? What is the origin of knowledge and wisdom? What are the limits and the extent of knowledge and wisdom? To Him be all the glory.

Soli Deo gloria.

Introduction: God Calls Us to Reason Together

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD.”

— Isaiah 1:18

The invitation of Isaiah 1:18 is stunning in its intimacy and its scope. The Holy One of Israel, whose holiness exceeds every human capacity to comprehend, invites finite and sinful creatures to reason with Him. This is not an invitation to reason our way to God without His help. It is an invitation to bring our minds under the light of His Word, to think His thoughts after Him, and to discover that the life of the mind is not a threat to faith but a dimension of it.

The verse that follows shows what kind of reasoning God has in view. He does not ask us to guess at His mind from the outside. He speaks first, He names our condition, and He promises a remedy: “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa. 1:18). The reasoning begins with God’s revealed word and ends in forgiveness. A Christian epistemology therefore starts where the Bible starts, with a God who speaks and a people who are called to listen, understand, and obey.

The great commandment includes the mind: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). The Christian is not called to intellectual suicide. She is called to intellectual submission, which means submitting every thought to the lordship of Christ, thinking with a redeemed mind under the authority of Scripture, and engaging the questions of the age with the wisdom that comes from above. Paul puts the same call positively: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). The mind is not discarded in salvation. It is renewed.

Why does epistemology matter to the ordinary believer? Because every conviction we hold rests on some answer to the question, “How do I know?” The student who sits in a lecture hall, the nurse who reads a medical study, the parent who scrolls through the news, and the church member who hears a sermon are all deciding, whether they realize it or not, what counts as knowledge and whom to trust. If we have not thought about these decisions, we will make them by habit, and the habits of our age are not neutral. They are formed by philosophies that we did not choose and often do not recognize.

A word about method may help. Reformed Christians have long taught that reason is a servant and not a master. Reason is *ministerial* when it serves the Word of God, by understanding it, arranging it, and applying it. Reason becomes *magisterial* when it sits as a judge over the Word and decides what God may and may not say. The Bible invites the first use and forbids the second. I will therefore reason with great seriousness in these pages, but I will always reason under Scripture. When I examine the philosophies of the East and the West, I will do so as Paul did at Athens, with courtesy and with attention, but also with the settled conviction that Christ is the measure of every claim.

Three errors lie close to the Christian path on either side. The first is rationalism, the claim that human reason is the final judge of what may be believed. The second is skepticism, the claim that nothing can be known with certainty. The third is fideism, the claim that faith needs no reasons and that the mind has no part in believing. Each error begins as an overcorrection of another. The rationalist fears the fideist’s carelessness, the fideist fears the rationalist’s pride, and the skeptic fears both. Scripture avoids all three by placing knowledge where it belongs: in the revelation of the God who made the knower, the known, and the way of knowing.

Three questions structure this study. What is the nature of knowledge and wisdom? What is the origin of knowledge and wisdom? What are the limit and the extent of knowledge and wisdom? These three questions correspond to the three chapters that follow, and together they form a comprehensive Christian epistemology. In the first chapter I

describe what genuine knowledge is, under the headings of reality, factuality, and principles. In the second I trace its sources, and I set the wisdom from above beside the wisdom that is demonic and the wisdom that is merely human. In the third I mark its boundaries, and I show that Christian knowledge is both bounded and sufficient.

I ask that you read as one who is invited, not as one who is cross-examined. The Lord who says, “Come now,” is the same Lord who says, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matt. 7:7). Bring your questions. Bring your doubts, if you have them. Bring also the settled conviction that the One who calls us to reason is the One who made reason, and that, as the psalmist says to God, “with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:9).

CHAPTER 1

The Nature of Knowledge and Wisdom

“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

— Colossians 1:17

Before we can ask where knowledge comes from or how far it extends, we must understand what knowledge is, and what counts as genuine knowing. The Christian tradition, drawing on the apostolic Scriptures, identifies three categories that together make up the domain of genuine knowledge: reality, factuality, and principles. Reality is what is. Factuality is what has happened and what is happening. Principles are the laws and axioms by which what is, and what happens, hold together and can be understood.

Ordinary life already depends on all three. A physician must be able to rely on a real body (reality), on accurate test results (facts), and on the laws of biology and logic that allow her to draw a conclusion from them (principles). Remove any one and knowing collapses. Deny reality, and nothing is left to be known. Deny facts, and history dissolves into fable. Deny principles, and reasoning itself becomes impossible, because there is no longer any difference between a valid argument and an invalid one.

The Bible stands behind all three. The apostle Paul says of Christ, “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). The Son of God is not only the Redeemer of sinners but the one in whom reality is sustained, in whom history is directed, and in whom the very laws of thought find their ground. The knowledge that Christians seek is therefore never neutral. It is knowledge of a world that has been made, governed, and upheld by a personal God. This is not an abstract thought. It is a reason to worship, because the more clearly we see how the world holds together, the more clearly we see the Christ who holds it.

In the three sections that follow I take each category in turn. I ask first what reality includes, then what makes a fact a fact, and finally what distinguishes a true principle from a mere opinion. At each step I will ask

the reader to notice what the Christian faith adds to the discussion, and what it refuses to give away.

A. Reality: The Visible and the Invisible

Christian epistemology begins with the recognition that reality is twofold: there is the visible world of physical matter and energy, and the invisible world of spiritual realities, namely God, angels, the human soul, and the moral order. Paul speaks of both when he says that by Christ “all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible” (Col. 1:16). The visible and the invisible alike are sustained by, and coherent in, the person of Christ (Col. 1:17). A knowledge that acknowledges only the visible is a knowledge truncated at the most important point.

The materialist assumption, that only physical things are real, is not a discovery of science but a philosophical presupposition imported into science. A presupposition is a basic belief that a person holds before any argument begins, and by which every later argument is judged. No microscope has ever found that only matter exists. That conclusion is brought to the microscope, not learned from it. The Christian is not afraid of the laboratory. Observation of the created world is a good gift, and I honour it. But the Christian refuses to allow a method for studying the visible to decide, in advance, that nothing else can be real.

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

— Hebrews 11:3

The Christian therefore insists that the invisible is more fundamental than the visible. The visible rests on the invisible. The seen depends on the unseen. Before the mountains stood, God was: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps. 90:2). All that is created has a beginning, but the Creator has none. The ultimate reality is not a force or a principle but a Person, and every lesser reality derives its existence, its order, and its meaning from Him.

This has consequences for how we regard science itself. Scientific work depends on assumptions that experiment cannot prove: that nature is orderly, that the human mind is able to grasp that order, and that tomorrow will resemble today. The Christian faith supplies a reason for each. A rational God made an ordered world, and He made human beings in His own image so that they could know it: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The astronomer and the pastor are therefore engaged in related tasks. Each is learning to read what God has made and what God has said.

Even the mind that is doing the thinking belongs, in part, to the invisible realm. No one has seen a thought, a conviction, or a conscience, and yet no one doubts that he has them. Jesus draws the distinction in a way that no materialist can accommodate: “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The soul is real, it is not the body, and it will outlast it. A theory of knowledge that has no place for the knower is a theory that has lost its subject.

The invisible realm is not a vague comfort for the religious. It is where the most important realities are found. Jesus teaches that “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Paul urges believers to fix their attention accordingly: “as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). The person who will not look beyond the visible will not see the soul, the conscience, or the God to whom he must give an account. I therefore ask my readers to apply this first category with great care in daily life: the things we cannot photograph are often the things that matter most.

B. Factuality: True History and Current Events

Genuine knowledge requires factuality, that is, correspondence with what actually happened and with what is actually happening. The Christian faith is not a system of timeless ideas floating above history. It

is grounded in specific historical events: the creation of the world, the incarnation of the Son, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension. The letter to the Hebrews opens with this very claim:

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

— Hebrews 1:1–2

God has spoken in time, to real people, in real places. The Gospel of Luke begins in the same spirit. The evangelist writes that he has “followed all things closely for some time past” in order to give an orderly account, “that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3–4). Peter is just as direct: “we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). The apostles do not ask us to believe a story because it is inspiring. They ask us to consider what happened.

True historical facts are the bedrock of Christian knowledge. The apostolic proclamation is historical before it is theological: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). The resurrection was not offered as a private feeling. Luke says that Jesus “presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs” (Acts 1:3). The factuality of the resurrection is the epistemological fulcrum of the entire Christian faith. Paul does not soften the point: “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). If He has been raised, every other truth-claim is illuminated by that foundational fact.

Paul also shows how factual claims are to be weighed. He lists the witnesses to the risen Lord, and he does so in a way that invites investigation: “he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:5–6). Here are

named persons, a large number, and a challenge to ask them. This is how responsible people test any historical claim. They ask who saw it, how many saw it, how early the report was given, and whether the witnesses had any reason to lie. The Christian faith welcomes such questions, because it was announced in public and not in a corner.

The category of factuality includes current events as well as past events. The Lord rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they could forecast the weather and could not read the times: “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (Luke 12:56). A Christian thinker is to be informed about what is actually happening in the world, and to interpret it in the light of what God has revealed. This requires effort. It means distinguishing a report from a rumour, a record from a slogan, and an eyewitness account from a secondhand claim.

Here the ninth commandment becomes an epistemological commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). To pass on a claim without checking it is to risk bearing false witness. Paul gives the positive form: “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). In an age of endless information, the discipline of asking, “Did this actually happen, and how do I know?” is not a luxury for scholars. It is part of loving the neighbour, and part of honouring the God of truth.

C. Principles, Laws, and Axioms

The third category of genuine knowledge is the realm of principles, laws, and axioms: the logical and moral structure of reality that makes coherent thinking and consistent living possible. An axiom is a basic truth that is accepted as the starting point of reasoning because nothing more basic can be offered to prove it. The laws of logic are of this kind: identity (a thing is what it is), non-contradiction (a thing cannot be both true and false in the same way at the same time), and excluded middle (a statement is either true or it is not). These laws are not human inventions. They reflect the rational structure of a universe created by a rational God.

The Bible assumes these laws on every page. When James asks, “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?” (Jas. 3:11), he is relying on the law of non-contradiction. When John writes that “no lie is from the truth” (1 John 2:21), he is saying that truth and falsehood exclude one another. And when Scripture says that God “never lies” (Titus 1:2), it ties the laws of thought to the character of God Himself. Truth is not a human convention. It is an attribute of the One who made us.

The moral law is likewise not a social convention. It reflects the character of the Holy God who made us in His image. Paul says that even those who never received the written law show “that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (Rom. 2:15). This is why people in every culture condemn betrayal and admire courage, even when they differ over details. A moral law written on the heart is evidence that we were made by a moral Lawgiver, and it is the reason that moral argument is possible at all.

The laws of nature belong to this category as well. They are not blind regularities that happen to hold. They are the steady commitments of a faithful God, who promised after the flood, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). The scientist who expects tomorrow to resemble today is living on a promise, whether or not he knows who made it. In this sense every successful experiment is a small act of trust in the order that God has sustained, and a quiet testimony that the universe is the work of a mind.

Christian epistemology insists on the distinction between genuine principles, which correspond to reality, and mere theories, opinions, myths, legends, imagination, and hearsay. A theory is an explanation that has been proposed but not yet established. An opinion is a personal judgment. A myth or a legend is a story, however beloved, that is not tied to verified events. Imagination is the power to picture what is not, and hearsay is a report that we have received from someone who did not see the matter for himself. Each has its place. None of them should be called

knowledge until it has been tested. Not every idea that presents itself as knowledge deserves the name.

The Christian thinker therefore applies rigorous discernment: “test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bereans are commended for exactly this habit. They “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). They did not reject Paul, and they did not simply accept him. They tested him. The standard of testing is not popular opinion but the Word of God, for “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

— John 17:17

These words from the prayer of Jesus give us the final criterion. Scripture does not merely contain truth. It is truth, and the psalmist says so plainly: “The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever” (Ps. 119:160). This does not make the Bible a textbook of every science. It means that where the Bible speaks, it speaks without error, and that every other claim to knowledge must in the end be measured against it.

Reality, factuality, and principles belong together. The reality that God has made is the stage; the facts of history are the drama that He has directed on it; and the laws of thought and conscience are the means by which we are able to understand both. In the person of Christ these three meet. He is the Creator of what is real, the Lord of what happens, and the Word through whom all things have order. To know Him is to know where genuine knowledge begins. In the next chapter I ask a further question: where does such knowledge come from, and why do so many sincere people arrive at other answers?

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

1. How does the recognition that reality includes both the visible and the invisible, and that the invisible is more fundamental, change the way you approach questions of science, philosophy, and daily life?
2. What does it mean that the Christian faith is grounded in historical facts? How does the factuality of the resurrection function as the epistemological foundation of Christian knowledge?
3. How do you apply the distinction between genuine principles and mere opinion, theory, or hearsay in your everyday engagement with information, news, and ideas?

CHAPTER 2

The Origin of Knowledge and Wisdom

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

— James 3:17

The second great epistemological question concerns the origin of knowledge and wisdom. Where does genuine knowing come from? Every philosophy answers this question, even when it pretends not to. The apostle James provides a foundational taxonomy. There is wisdom from above (Jas. 3:17), which is divine. There is wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (Jas. 3:15). And behind both stands the human knowledge and wisdom that operates apart from divine illumination. Paul explains why that illumination is needed: “no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). Understanding these three sources is essential to Christian epistemological discernment.

The three sources are not equal, and they do not simply compete on a level field. God is the Creator, and all true knowledge in any human mind is a gift from Him. Demonic wisdom is a parasite on truth, using what is accurate to serve what is false. Depraved human wisdom is what remains when the creature, made to know his Maker, tries to know the world without Him. The result is neither pure ignorance nor pure insight. It is a mixture of real discovery and deep distortion, and sorting the one from the other is one of the main tasks of a Christian mind.

I treat the three sources in order. Under the third I give the largest space, because that is where the Christian student meets the most ideas. I survey the great Eastern and Western traditions and the modern and postmodern movements, and I try to describe each fairly before I assess it. I then turn to the fourth heading, Christian thinking, to show how the people of God have received, tested, and redeemed the intellectual life under the lordship of Christ.

A. Divine Revealed Knowledge and Wisdom

The first and foundational source of genuine knowledge is divine revelation. God speaks: in creation, in Scripture, and supremely in His Son. Revelation means that God discloses what we could not discover by ourselves, and that He does so on His own initiative. The psalmist describes the first of these voices: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). This is natural revelation, the knowledge of God given to all people through the created order. Paul says of it that “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:19–20).

Natural revelation gives all humanity access to the knowledge of God’s existence, power, and moral demands through the created order. It leaves every person “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20), but it does not reveal the way of salvation. For that, God gave special revelation: the Scriptures, which tell the redeemed of Christ, of God’s character, and of His purposes for history. The two revelations come from one Author and never contradict one another. Calvin saw the relationship clearly when he opened the *Institutes* by observing that nearly all the wisdom we possess consists of two parts, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. Neither can be rightly had without the other, and neither can be rightly had apart from the God who speaks.

“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”

— Psalm 36:9

The wisdom from above is described by James as “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere” (Jas. 3:17). This is not the wisdom of the seminar room or the laboratory alone. It is wisdom that is moral and relational before it is intellectual. It begins with the fear of the Lord: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov. 9:10). The fear of the Lord is not terror but reverent

submission, and it is the starting posture of every true knower. It is given generously to those who ask: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (Jas. 1:5).

Three words help to keep the doctrine clear. *Revelation* is God’s disclosure of Himself and His will. *Inspiration* is the work of the Holy Spirit by which the Scriptures that record that disclosure are “breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16). *Illumination* is the Spirit’s work in the believer by which the eyes of the heart are opened to receive what has been revealed. Paul prays for this in Ephesians: “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened” (Eph. 1:17–18). Without revelation there would be nothing to know. Without illumination we would not receive it.

This wisdom is received through the Spirit, who searches the depths of God and reveals them to the believer. Paul writes: “these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). The result is that in Christ we have a fullness that no tradition outside Him can supply, for in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Here the Christian finds both comfort and a charge. The comfort is that the deepest questions have answers. The charge is to seek them where they are found, and to receive them with thanksgiving.

B. Devilish and Demonic Knowledge

James identifies a second source of wisdom, one that is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic (Jas. 3:15): “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (Jas. 3:16). This is not ignorance but misdirected knowledge, which is intelligence in the service of evil. The demons “believe” and “shudder” (Jas. 2:19). Their knowledge of God’s existence is accurate, but it produces only terror and malice rather than worship and love. It is a sobering reminder that knowing true facts about God is not the same as knowing God.

“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

— Genesis 3:1

The pattern of demonic knowledge appears at the beginning. The serpent does not open with an open denial of God. He opens with a question that plants doubt about what God has said, and then he offers a counterfeit of knowledge: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). The temptation is epistemological at its root. It invites the creature to become the judge of truth and falsehood, good and evil, in the place of the Creator. That is autonomy, the claim to be a law to oneself, and it has been the engine of fallen thought ever since.

The Christian apologist must reckon with the reality that some of the most intellectually sophisticated arguments against the faith are not simply human errors. They may be energized by the adversary who desires to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Paul says that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). The enemy may even use Scripture: when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness he said, “for it is written” (Matt. 4:6), and he used the words to serve a purpose that God never intended. Paul warns that “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Error does not always look ugly.

This is why Paul’s call to take “every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5) is a call to spiritual as well as intellectual warfare. He reminds the Ephesians, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). John gives a practical rule: “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). Yet a caution is needed. Not every mistaken idea is demonic, and Christians should not treat every opponent as a servant of Satan. The task is to test teaching by Scripture, to answer error with truth and gentleness, and to leave the final judgment of persons to God.

C. Depraved Human Knowledge: Eastern and Western Philosophy

The third source is depraved human knowledge: the impressive but ultimately insufficient intellectual achievements of humanity operating apart from divine revelation. Paul's diagnosis is clear: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). He says elsewhere that the Gentiles walk "in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:17–18). This is not anti-intellectualism. It is a recognition that the greatest human minds, unaided by the Spirit, cannot arrive at saving knowledge of God.

The word *depraved* needs careful definition. Total depravity, as the Reformed tradition teaches it, does not mean that every person is as wicked as he could be, or that unbelievers know nothing. It means that sin has touched every part of the person, including the mind, so that no faculty works as God designed it to work. The Reformed tradition also speaks of common grace, the goodness of God by which He restrains the full effects of sin and lets even unbelievers discover real truth and produce real beauty. Paul at Athens could quote the Greek poets with approval: "For we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:28). The Christian therefore receives gladly what is true in any tradition, and refuses what is false.

"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."

— Colossians 2:8

Paul's words do not forbid philosophy. They forbid captivity to philosophy. The test is whether a way of thinking is "according to Christ." I now survey the major traditions with that test in mind, beginning in the East and then moving to the West and to the modern and postmodern world.

Eastern Philosophical Traditions

The great Eastern philosophical traditions represent brilliant but ultimately bounded attempts to understand reality and the moral life. Confucius (Kung-Fu-Tze), who taught in China around five centuries before Christ, offered a negative Golden Rule: “Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do to you.” This is moral wisdom of a high order. It honours family, learning, and public virtue, and many Christians have found in it a true echo of Paul’s teaching that “the work of the law is written on their hearts” (Rom. 2:15). But it is wisdom that regulates human behaviour without addressing the source of human evil or providing the power to obey its own precepts. Paul says that “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20), not deliverance from it.

Lao Tzu’s yin and yang principle of complementary opposites in nature, which belongs to the Taoist tradition, captures something real about the balance of creation. Day follows night, and strength is shown in yielding. But the principle lacks a Creator to sustain it, and when it is applied to morality it blurs the line between good and evil, which Scripture keeps sharp: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). Mencius, the great follower of Confucius, held that human nature is by birth inclined to goodness. His optimism stands in stark contrast to Scripture’s diagnosis of radical depravity: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). A tradition that begins by trusting the human heart cannot arrive at the cross.

Western Philosophical Traditions

The great Greek philosophical schools represent the highest achievements of Western intellectual tradition apart from revelation. The Naturalists who preceded Socrates asked the foundational question, “What is the fundamental nature of reality?”, and answered variously with water (Thales), air, fire, atoms (Democritus), and flux. Heraclitus is remembered for saying that “Nature is in flux always.” Their commitment to rational inquiry was a genuine good, and it laid foundations for later science. Their inability to reach God through that

inquiry was the inevitable result of unaided reason, for “the world did not know God through wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:21).

The Sophists introduced moral relativism: any position can be defended if you know both sides. Their best-known slogan, attributed to Protagoras, was that man is the measure of all things. This is the ancient predecessor of postmodern deconstruction. Socrates the Moralist countered with “Know thyself!”, a commitment to personal integrity and the examined life. Plato the Idealist grounded reality in eternal Forms known by the mind, and he taught that the visible world is a shadow of a higher one. Aristotle the Realist developed the science of logic, with its laws of identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, and logical opposition, which remain the foundation of valid reasoning to this day.

Christians owe these thinkers a debt. When Paul stood before the Areopagus in Athens, he did not begin by denouncing Greek culture. He began with an altar: “I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). He met the Greeks on their ground, and he showed that their longing had a true object. But he then pressed beyond what Greek wisdom could supply, to the resurrection of the dead, of which God “has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). The Greeks asked for wisdom, and the Lord gave it in a way they did not expect.

Modern and Postmodern Thought

The modern and postmodern philosophical movements continue the trajectory of depraved human wisdom in increasingly radical directions. The early modern age began with a bold confidence in the individual mind. Rationalists such as Descartes tried to build knowledge on what reason alone could not doubt. Empiricists such as Locke and Hume tried to build it on sensory experience, and Hume’s questions about cause and effect left many wondering whether anything could be known with certainty. Kant sought to answer both camps by arguing that the mind shapes what it knows, and that the existence of God lies beyond what

pure reason can know. In each case the knower was placed at the centre, and God was moved to the edge.

The movements that followed make the pattern plain. Pragmatism (“the end justifies the means”) abandons objective morality for instrumental utility, so that an idea is true if it works. Existentialism (“I exist so I behave”) grounds ethics in the individual’s self-created meaning. Post-existentialism collapses into radical subjectivism: “What is good to you is bad to me.” New Age thinking denies all absolutes: “There are only relatives.” And free-thinking libertarianism removes all personal authority, responsibility, and accountability. Postmodernism gathers these tendencies into a general suspicion of any claim to universal truth, and it treats every large account of reality as an exercise of power. Its ancient parallel is written in the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

Each of these movements reflects, in different ways, Paul’s description of the mind that has suppressed the truth in unrighteousness: “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:21). The brilliant mind without the fear of God does not become neutral. It becomes an increasingly sophisticated system for avoiding the Creator. The wise reader will notice the warning of Proverbs: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov. 14:12). Yet the Christian responds with compassion, not scorn. Behind every system stand people made in the image of God, who are looking for answers, and who need to hear that the answers have been given.

D. Christian Thinking: From Jewish Roots to Pauline Synthesis

Christian thinking is not a rejection of all prior philosophical tradition. It is the redemption and transformation of the intellectual life under the lordship of Christ. It begins in the Jewish phenomenal and personal engagement with historical reality, an engagement of hearing, seeing, and

touching. John writes in this spirit: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands” (1 John 1:1). It moves through the climactic revelation of Christ. Jesus tells His opponents, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). He also says of Himself, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Truth in the Christian faith is not finally a proposition. It is a Person.

The apostolic tradition, which we may describe as Matthean, Johannine, Jamesian, and Petrine, is both gospel-oriented and godly-life-oriented. It is gospel-oriented in the manner of Acts 1:3, where Jesus gave “many proofs” and spoke “about the kingdom of God.” It is godly-life-oriented in the manner of Peter, who begins his first letter with praise: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). In the apostolic mind, doctrine and life are never separated. What is believed must be lived, and what is lived must be believed.

Paul’s synthetic thinking in Romans represents the most comprehensive integration of redemptive history and systematic theology in the New Testament. In eleven chapters he moves from the wrath of God against suppressed truth to the justification of sinners, from the history of Israel to the mercy of God for all nations. He closes the argument not with a conclusion but with a doxology: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36). Then he turns to the mind, and the argument of eleven chapters becomes an appeal to the renewed thinking of the believer (Rom. 12:2). The Christian mind is synthetic because Christ is the centre from which all truth is seen to cohere.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

— Romans 12:2

The church fathers and the Reformers carried this tradition forward. Augustine taught that we must believe in order to understand, and Anselm of Canterbury gave the principle its classic form: faith seeking understanding. The Anselmian principle establishes that Christian knowledge begins with trust in God’s revelation and then moves toward intellectual comprehension. It is not the credulity of the fideist, who believes without thought, and it is not the confidence of the rationalist, who will believe only what reason first approves. It is the confidence of the child who trusts a Father and then, in trusting, begins to understand His house.

In the last century two voices in particular called evangelicals back to this tradition. Francis Schaeffer insisted that Christianity offers “true truth,” a faith that answers the whole range of human questions and does not retreat into a private religious sphere. Cornelius Van Til argued that every system of thought rests on ultimate presuppositions and that the Christian must therefore reason from the authority of Scripture, not toward it. The Schaefferian and Van Tilian approach together insists that Christian thinking must constitute a comprehensive World-and-Life View, which I call a *cosmoscope*: a single lens through which the whole of reality is seen, with Christ at the centre of all knowing and all living. Abraham Kuyper stated the claim with a boldness that still stirs the heart: there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, “Mine!”

Reflection Questions — Chapter 2

1. How does the distinction between wisdom from above (divine), wisdom from below (demonic), and depraved human wisdom change the way you engage with philosophical, cultural, and scientific ideas? What is the test you apply?
2. What genuine insights do you find in the Eastern or Western philosophical traditions that Christian thinking can appreciate and even incorporate? Where do they fundamentally fail?

3. How does the Anselmian principle (“faith seeking understanding”) differ from both blind fideism (“just believe without thinking”) and rationalism (“reason your way to faith”)? Which error is your church or culture most prone to?

CHAPTER 3

The Limit and Extent of Knowledge and Wisdom

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

— Deuteronomy 29:29

The third great epistemological question is the most humbling: how much can we know? What are the limits of human knowledge, and what lies beyond those limits? Every thoughtful person eventually meets a boundary. The scientist reaches the edge of the measurable, the philosopher reaches the edge of the provable, and the believer reaches the edge of the comprehensible. What a person does at that boundary reveals what he really believes about knowledge.

Three responses are common. The first is the arrogance of rationalism, which says that reason can know everything and that whatever reason cannot grasp is not worth knowing. Kant, who was no friend of arrogance, once wrote that he had found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith. The second is the despair of skepticism, which says that we cannot know anything with certainty. The third is a retreat into fideism, which gives up on reasons altogether. The Christian answer is none of these. It is the confidence of revealed religion: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever” (Deut. 29:29).

This verse draws a line, and it places the line where God Himself has placed it. On one side are the secret things, which are God’s alone. On the other are the revealed things, which are ours, and which we are given for a purpose: “that we may do all the words of this law.” The line is not a wall of frustration. It is a gift. It tells us what we may ask with confidence, and it tells us when to stop asking and begin to worship. In the sections below I consider the extent of what God has revealed, the

boundaries of demonic and depraved human knowledge, and the Christian knowledge that is both bounded and sufficient.

A. The Extent of Divine Revealed Knowledge

God has revealed far more than we often realize. Paul writes to Timothy: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This is an extraordinary claim. It says that the Scriptures, received by faith and illuminated by the Spirit, equip the believer for comprehensive life: every moral decision, every intellectual challenge, every vocational task. Peter makes the same point about the person of Christ: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” (2 Pet. 1:3).

The breadth of divine revealed knowledge encompasses the nature of God and His attributes; the creation and structure of the cosmos; the nature and dignity of human beings as image-bearers; the reality and extent of sin; the history of redemption from creation to consummation; the moral law and its fulfilment in Christ; the eschatological hope of the new creation; and the wisdom for living in every domain of human life. This is not a narrow religious knowledge. It is a comprehensive account of reality. It tells us who we are, where we came from, what has gone wrong, how it has been put right, and where all things are going.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

— Psalm 119:105

Yet we must distinguish between exhaustive knowledge and sufficient knowledge. God has not told us everything, and no human being has ever known everything that can be known. But what He has told us is enough. John explains why his Gospel was written: “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). The Scriptures are sufficient for salvation, for godliness, and for the right interpretation of

the rest of experience. This is the doctrine the Reformers called *sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone is the final authority, not because nothing else teaches us anything, but because nothing else can overrule what God has said.

The Bible also teaches that the reception of revelation depends on the Spirit. The psalmist prays, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Ps. 119:18). The wonders were already in the law; what he needed was sight. This is why a person can read the same page for years and see little, and then one day, by the Spirit, see the glory of Christ in it. Revealed knowledge is therefore wide in extent and yet received only by grace. We should read Scripture with the Bible open and the hands lifted in prayer.

Reformed theologians describe the character of this knowledge by saying that it is *analogical*. Our knowledge of God is true, because He has spoken in words that we can understand, but it is not identical with God’s own knowledge of Himself. God knows all things at once and without learning. We know by being taught, and we know in part. When God reveals Himself, He comes down to our level, as a father speaks to a small child, and what He says is true. The child does not know all that the father knows, but the child is not deceived.

The secret things are not only the deep matters of eternity. Some are very practical. When the disciples asked the Lord about the timing of the end, He answered, “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matt. 24:36). If the Lord Himself, in His state of humiliation, placed this knowledge in the Father’s keeping, then we should not presume to calculate it. The same restraint applies to many curiosities that tempt Christians: speculations about the precise manner of the hidden counsel of God, or the particular future of a nation or a family. Where God has been silent, the faithful response is not invention but trust.

The extent of revealed knowledge should lead to gratitude, and also to responsibility. A person who has been given a lamp must walk by it. Revelation is not given to satisfy curiosity but to shape obedience, which is why Moses ends the verse with the words “that we may do all the

words of this law.” Knowledge that does not lead to obedience is the knowledge of the demons. Knowledge that leads to obedience is the knowledge that leads to life.

B. The Boundary of Demonic and Depraved Human Knowledge

Demonic knowledge is powerful but purposeful in its destructiveness. It has no redemptive goal. It can analyze, critique, and deceive, but it cannot save, heal, or restore. Its limit is the very thing it denies: the sovereignty of the Creator God, who “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col. 2:15). The cross is the boundary of demonic knowledge and power. The same is shown in the opening chapters of Job, where Satan can act only within the permission that God grants: “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand” (Job 1:12). The adversary is real, and he is on a chain.

Depraved human knowledge reaches its limit precisely where it most needs to arrive: at the knowledge of God and the knowledge of salvation. Paul writes: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). The limit of human wisdom is not arbitrary. It is the merciful design of a God who refuses to let His glory be captured by human intellectual achievement. He saves through the foolishness of the cross, and “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1 Cor. 1:25).

Even within the created order, human knowledge meets boundaries that no discipline can cross. The Preacher observed that “man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man toils in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out” (Eccl. 8:17). When God answered Job out of the whirlwind, He did not supply an explanation of suffering. He asked a question that exposes the creature’s limits: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have

understanding” (Job 38:4). The right response of the creature is not outrage but silence, and then worship.

The Bible adds a sober word about the self-assurance of the learned. Paul writes of those who suppressed the truth, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22). The greatest danger in intellectual life is not ignorance but the pride that will not admit it. Whenever a school of thought proposes that it has found the final explanation of all things, without any need of God, the Christian may be sure that it has crossed the boundary that Deuteronomy 29:29 draws. The idols of the study are as real as the idols of the temple, and they ask for the same worship.

This does not mean that human inquiry is worthless or that scientists and scholars should lay down their work. It means that human inquiry has a ceiling that no genius can lift. Where the ceiling lies depends on the kind of question. Questions about the structure of the physical world may be pursued with great success. Questions about the meaning of existence, the problem of guilt, and the hope of life beyond death cannot be answered by calculation, and they cannot be answered by speculation. They are answered, if at all, by revelation. Paul warns Timothy to avoid “the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim. 6:20), because a claim to know where one cannot know leads away from the faith.

C. The Christian Knowledge That Is Both Bounded and Sufficient

Christian knowledge is bounded. Paul acknowledges it without embarrassment: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). We do not have exhaustive knowledge. We do not understand every mystery. We hold many things by faith that we cannot fully comprehend by reason: the Trinity, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, and the harmony of God’s sovereignty with human responsibility. This is not a deficiency. It is the appropriate epistemological posture of the creature before the Creator.

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”

— Romans 11:33

Paul’s cry in Romans 11:33 is not the confession of a defeated mind. It is the worship of a mind that has seen far enough to know that it cannot see everything. The same apostle goes on to ask, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (Rom. 11:34). God Himself says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD” (Isa. 55:8). The gap between God and ourselves is not only a gap of size but of kind. We do not stand on His level and look down on a bigger version of what we already understand. We are creatures, and He is the Creator.

The right posture before such mysteries is humility, not defeat. The psalmist models it: “O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me” (Ps. 131:1). Paul adds a caution about pride in the learned: “This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1). Knowledge that is not joined to love and humility becomes a weapon. The person who thinks that he has mastered the mind of God has not yet begun to know it: “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2).

Yet bounded Christian knowledge is also sufficient: sufficient for salvation, for godly living, for intellectual engagement with the questions of the age, and for the defence of the faith. The Holy Spirit is the great epistemological gift of the new covenant: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12). Paul then adds the astonishing conclusion, “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). He does not mean that we have every fact that Christ knows. He means that we have been given His outlook, His values, and His way of seeing, and that these are formed in us by His Word and His Spirit.

How, then, should we live within these limits? The book of Proverbs gives the simplest rule: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do

not lean on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5). To trust is not to stop thinking. It is to stop leaning, which is to rest the weight of our lives on someone more reliable than our own minds. The author of Hebrews says that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is the way a bounded creature relates to what lies beyond its sight. It is not the enemy of knowledge but its proper companion at the boundary.

This gives the Christian a way of facing both arrogance and despair. When I am tempted to think that I understand more than I do, the Lord reminds me that the secret things belong to Him. When I am tempted to think that nothing can be known, the Lord reminds me that the revealed things belong to me and to my children forever. I am therefore permitted, and indeed commanded, to teach what He has said with confidence, and to confess what He has not said with humility. A pastor, a parent, or a professor who learns this posture is protected from the two ditches on either side of the road.

The Christian does not need to know everything in order to know enough. She needs the Spirit, the Scripture, and the mind of Christ. With these she can face the lecture hall, the laboratory, the hospital bed, and the grave. She can say, “I do not know why,” and “I do know whom.” She can leave the secret things with the Lord and walk, in the light of what is revealed, toward the day when the mirror is no longer dim.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 3

1. How does the distinction between “the secret things that belong to the Lord” and “the things that are revealed” shape your intellectual humility before mysteries you cannot resolve? What are the greatest mysteries you hold by faith?
2. Paul says that the world could not know God through its wisdom, so God was pleased to save through the folly of preaching. How does this reality shape your approach to evangelism and apologetics?

3. What does it mean practically to have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16)? How does the Spirit’s work in illumination relate to your study of Scripture, theology, and the created world?

Conclusion: Thinking from Above

Epistemology deals with three great questions: the nature of knowledge and wisdom, the origin of knowledge and wisdom, and the limit and extent of knowledge and wisdom. The Christian answers all three from the same foundation: the God who is, who speaks, and who illuminates the minds of His people through His Spirit and His Word.

True knowledge is knowledge of what is real, the visible and invisible together, sustained by Christ in whom all things hold together. It also includes the true facts of history and the true principles by which reality is ordered. Its deepest origin is divine revelation, the wisdom from above that is pure, peaceable, and full of mercy. Beside it stand two counterfeits, the knowledge that is demonic and the knowledge that is merely human, and the Christian is called to tell them apart. Its limit is the gracious boundary that the Creator has set: we know in part now, but we shall know fully in the age to come.

The call to every Christian thinker is threefold. Receive the knowledge and wisdom that comes from above, grounded in the Bible. Be ready to speak the truth and give a reason for it (2 Cor. 10:4–5; 1 Pet. 3:15). And speak that truth in love: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Truth without love becomes harsh. Love without truth becomes sentimental. The believer who holds both has a mind and a heart that are made like Christ.

Three habits follow from what we have seen. The first is the habit of testing. Because we know that not every claim to knowledge deserves the name, we weigh what we read and hear against what God has said, as the Bereans did. The second is the habit of humility. Because we know that our knowledge is bounded, we hold our conclusions with open hands, we admit what we do not know, and we refuse to bluff. The third is the habit of worship. Because we know that all true knowledge comes from God, we receive it with thanks, and we use it to His glory. “The

fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7), and the one who begins there will not end in vanity.

If these pages have done their work, the reader will see that the three questions are really one. To ask what knowledge is, where it comes from, and how far it extends is to ask who God is, what He has said, and what it means to be His creature. The student of epistemology is finally a student of the Lord.

A word to pastors and teachers may be added. An elder is required to “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). The church does not need to choose between a faithful pulpit and a thinking congregation. It needs both. If we teach our people how to know, and not only what to know, we will send them into the lecture hall, the workplace, and the public square equipped, not to win arguments for their own sake, but to commend Christ.

The Christian mind is not a withdrawal from the intellectual life of the age. It is a redeemed engagement with it, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. I pray that the student, the teacher, the scholar, and the plain believer who reads these pages will go back to their work with a lighter fear and a deeper reverence. The invitation has not changed. Come, let us reason together, says the LORD.

Soli Deo gloria.

Personal Questions and Challenges

On the Nature of Knowledge

1. What is true knowledge and wisdom? How do you distinguish between genuine knowledge (reality, factuality, principles) and mere opinion, theory, or hearsay in the information you consume daily?
2. How does the recognition that all reality, visible and invisible, is held together by Christ (Col. 1:17) affect the way you study science, history, philosophy, and theology? Are these separate domains, or does Christ integrate them?
3. What is the relationship between the fear of the Lord (the beginning of wisdom) and the love of the Lord (the goal of wisdom)? Can you have one without the other? Name one concrete habit you will change this week so that your daily reading and listening are more carefully tested.

On the Origin of Wisdom

1. Where did you get your most fundamental convictions about reality, morality, and meaning? Have you examined their origin, whether they come from above, from the prevailing culture, or from some other source?
2. How do you engage with the great philosophical traditions, Eastern and Western, appreciating their genuine insights while maintaining the priority of divine revelation? Where do you see your own thinking most influenced by worldly wisdom?
3. What does “taking every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5) look like practically in your media consumption, your academic studies, and your professional work? Choose one of these three areas and decide what you will change this week.

On the Limit of Knowledge

1. What is the limit and extent of our knowledge and wisdom? Where do you find yourself most tempted toward either intellectual arrogance (claiming to know more than revelation warrants) or intellectual despair (refusing to make truth-claims for fear of being wrong)?
2. How does the promise that the Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13) relate to the ongoing work of theological study, church tradition, and Christian scholarship?
3. What mystery, what “secret thing that belongs to the Lord,” do you find yourself most wanting to resolve? What would it mean to hold that mystery with faith and peace? Write down one practical step by which you will practise that peace in the coming week.

Soli Deo gloria.

Glossary

Analogical Knowledge: The teaching that our knowledge of God is true, because He has spoken in words we can understand, but is not identical with God's own knowledge of Himself.

Antithesis: The Reformed teaching that the thinking of those who submit to God's revelation and the thinking of those who suppress it start from opposite foundations, even when they sometimes reach the same conclusions.

Apologetics: The reasoned defence of the Christian faith, undertaken in obedience to the command to be ready to give a reason for our hope.

Axiom: A basic truth that is accepted as the starting point of reasoning because nothing more basic can be offered to prove it.

Common Grace: The goodness of God by which He restrains the full effects of sin and allows even those who do not trust Christ to discover real truth and to produce real good.

Cosmoscope: A term used in this study for a comprehensive World-and-Life View: a single lens through which the whole of reality is seen, with Christ at the centre of all knowing and living.

Epistemology: The study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge, which asks what is real, how we know it, and how much we can know.

Existentialism: A modern philosophy that grounds meaning and morality in the individual's own choices and experience rather than in God or in a fixed moral order.

Faith Seeking Understanding: The principle, associated with Anselm of Canterbury, that Christian knowledge begins with trust in God's revelation and then moves toward intellectual comprehension.

Fideism: The error of holding that faith needs no reasons and that the mind has no part in believing.

Illumination: The work of the Holy Spirit by which the eyes of the believer's heart are opened to understand and receive what God has revealed.

Inspiration: The work of the Holy Spirit by which the human authors of Scripture wrote what God intended, so that the Scriptures are "breathed out by God."

Ministerial Reason: The use of reason as a servant of the Word of God, understanding, arranging, and applying what God has said, as opposed to the magisterial use that sets reason over the Word as its judge.

Natural Revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, His power, and His moral demands to all people through the created order and the conscience.

Postmodernism: A way of thinking marked by suspicion of any claim to universal truth, and by the view that large accounts of reality are expressions of power rather than descriptions of what is real.

Pragmatism: The view that an idea is true or good if it works, so that usefulness takes the place of correspondence to reality.

Presupposition: A basic belief held before any argument begins, by which later arguments are judged.

Rationalism: The error of holding that human reason is the final judge of what may be believed.

Relativism: The view that truth and morality are not fixed but depend on the person, the culture, or the situation.

Revelation: God's disclosure of Himself and His will, which we could not discover by ourselves.

Skepticism: The view that nothing can be known with certainty.

Sola Scriptura: A Latin phrase meaning “Scripture alone,” the Reformation teaching that the Bible is the final and sufficient authority for faith and life.

Special Revelation: God’s disclosure of Himself and of the way of salvation in His Word, the Scriptures, and supremely in His Son.

Total Depravity: The teaching that sin has touched every part of the human person, including the mind, so that no faculty works as God designed it to work. It does not mean that every person is as wicked as he could be.

World-and-Life View: A comprehensive outlook that shapes how a person understands God, the world, human beings, and the way to live.

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About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Pastor Bal served for many years as a pastor and theological educator, and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.), a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship have addressed the most foundational questions of the Christian faith, and these studies, expanded, deepened, and formatted for print, have shaped the theological works he continues to write.

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. He reads every theological question through the lens of the whole counsel of God, and has spent a lifetime teaching others to do the same.

The present work, *The Epistemological Thinking for Christians*, represents Pastor Bal's sustained engagement with the questions of Christian epistemology: what we know, where our knowledge comes from, and how far it may reach. It sets the great philosophical traditions of East and West beside the knowledge and wisdom that God has revealed, and it invites the reader to love the Lord with all the mind.

Other theological works by the author:

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ

Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist
What the Christian Church Should Be
The Reformed Theological Paradigm
The Holy Loving Triune Lord God
The Progressive Parallelisms in the Book of Revelation
The Seventy Weeks of Daniel
The Five Solas
The Threefold Understanding of Salvation
The Thinking Process of the Christian Mind
Millennium in the Bible
The Seven Loci of Christian Theology
Six Calvinistic Schools on Soteriology
Paul's Summary of His Message in the Ministry
Doctrines of Divine Grace Part II
Biblical Salvation
The Work of the Holy Spirit
The Reformed Theological Summary of Life
The Five Illustrations of Divine Truths
Our Attitude Towards Wealth
The Main Subjects of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses
The Seven Churches of Revelation
In Everything, Give Thanks to God
Divine Election unto Salvation
Comparing and Contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism
The Athanasian Creed Understood by Faith
Vital Words Related to Salvation
The Seven Loci of Dogmatics

He lives with his beloved wife, Estrella. He is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ,

until the day when faith gives way to sight and the knowledge that is now partial becomes the knowledge that is full.

Soli Deo gloria.