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The Knowledge of the Self-Revealing God: Starting Point for the Christian Worldview

The Christian worldview is structured, first of all, by the revealed knowledge of God. There is no other starting point for an authentic Christian worldview—and there is no substitute.

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One of the most important principles of Christian thinking is the recognition that there is no stance of intellectual neutrality. No human being is capable of achieving a process of thought that requires no presuppositions, assumptions, or inherited intellectual components. All human thinking requires some presupposed framework that defines reality and explains, in the first place, how it is possible that we can know anything at all.



The process of human cogitation and intellectual activity has been, in itself, the focus of intense intellectual concern. In philosophy, the field of study that is directed toward the possibility of human knowledge is epistemology. The ancient philosophers were concerned with the problem of knowledge, but this problem becomes all the more complex and acute in a world of intellectual diversity. In the aftermath of the Enlightenment, the problem of epistemology moved to the very center of philosophical thought.

Are we capable of knowing truth? Is truth, in any objective sense, accessible to us? How is it that different people, different cultures, and different faiths hold to such different understandings and affirm such irreconcilable claims to truth? Does truth even exist at all? If so, can we really know it?

As the modern age gave way to the postmodern, the problem of knowledge became only more complex. Many postmodern thinkers reject the possibility of objective truth and suggest that all truth is nothing more than social construction and the application of political power. Among some, relativism is the reigning understanding of truth. Among others, the recognition of intellectual pluralism leads to an affirmation that all truth claims are trapped within cultural assumptions and can be known only through the lenses of distorted perspective.

In other words, the problem of knowledge is front and center as we think about the responsibility of forming a Christian worldview and loving God with our minds. The good news is this—just as we are saved by grace alone, we find that the starting point for all Christian thinking in the grace of God is demonstrated to us by means of his self-revelation.

The Self-Revealing God of the Bible

The starting point for all genuinely Christian thinking is the existence of the self-revealing God of the Bible. The foundation of the Christian worldview is the knowledge of the one true and living God. The fact of God's existence sets the Christian worldview apart from all others—and, from the very beginning, we must affirm that our knowledge of God is entirely dependent upon the gift of divine revelation.

Christian thinking is not reducible to mere theism—belief in the existence of a personal God. To the contrary, authentic Christian thinking begins with the knowledge that the only true God is the God who has revealed himself to us in the Bible.

As the late Carl F. H. Henry reminded us, “Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.”

That same affirmation is true for all Christian thinking. Christianity affirms reason, but divine revelation is the source of all truth. We are given the capacity to know, but we are first known by our Creator before we come to know him by means of his gift of self-revelation.

The Total Truthfulness of the Bible

Once our dependence upon the Bible is made clear, the importance of affirming the total inspiration and truthfulness of the Bible is apparent. Affirming the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible is not merely a matter of articulating a high view of Scripture. The affirmation of the Bible’s total truthfulness is essential for believers to have an adequate confidence that we can know what God would have us to know. Furthermore, our affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture is based, not only in Scripture’s internal claims, but also in the very character of God. The God who knew us and loved us long before we came to know him is the God we can trust to give us a completely trustworthy revelation of himself.

Even so, ignorance of basic biblical truth is rampant. Remarkably, this is a problem inside, as well as outside, the church. Many church members seem as ignorant of the true and living God as the general public. Too many pulpits are silent and compromised. The “ordinary god” of popular belief is the only god known by many.

As Christian Smith and his fellow researchers have documented, the faith of many Americans can be described as “moralistic therapeutic deism”—a system of belief that provides the image of a comfortable, non-threatening deity who is not terribly concerned with our behavior but does want us to be happy.

The accuracy of the Christian worldview in the modern age can be traced directly to a significant shift in the doctrine of God. The God worshiped by millions of modern persons is a deity cut down to postmodern size.

The One True God

The one true God, the God who reveals himself in the Bible, is a God who defines his own existence, sets his own terms, and rules over his own creation. The sheer shallowness of much modern “spirituality” stands as a monument to the human attempt to rob God of his glory. The Christian worldview cannot be recovered without a profound rediscovery of the knowledge of God.

Inevitably, our concept of God determines our worldview. The question of the existence or non-existence of God is primary, but so is the question of God’s power and character. Theologians speak of the “attributes” of God, meaning the particulars about God’s revealed nature. If we begin with the right concept of God, our worldview will be properly aligned. If our concept of God is sub-biblical, our worldview will be sub-biblical, as well.

God’s attributes reveal his power and his character. The God of the Bible is omniscient and omnipotent, and he is also faithful, good, patient, loving, merciful, gracious, majestic, and just.

At the foundation of all the attributes ascribed to God in Scripture are two great truths which form central pillars for all Christian thinking. The first of these is *God’s total, final, and undiluted sovereignty*. God’s sovereignty is the exercise of his rightful authority. His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are the instruments of his sovereignty.

The second of these great pillars is *God’s holiness*. Just as sovereignty is the great term that includes all of God’s attributes of power, holiness includes all of the moral attributes ascribed to God in the Bible. At the first level, holiness defines God as the source of all that is good, true, beautiful, loving, just, righteous, and merciful. In other words, holiness establishes that God is not merely the *possessor* of these moral distinctives—he is the ultimate *source* of them, as well. In

the end, God is not so much defined by these moral attributes as much as he defines them by the display of his character in the Bible.

In other words, to say that God is righteous is not to say that he passes muster when tested against our own understandings of righteousness. To the contrary, we gain any adequate understanding of righteousness only by coming to know the self-revealing God who is himself righteous. One of the central problems of modern thought is the attempt by human beings to judge God by our own categories of moral perfection. Our proper responsibility is to bring our categories into submission to the reality and revelation of God.

The question of the existence or non-existence of God is primary, but so is the question of God's power and character. The Christian worldview is structured, first of all, by the revealed knowledge of God. And this means the comprehensive knowledge of the self-revealing God who defines himself and will accept no rivals. There is no other starting point for an authentic Christian worldview—and there is no substitute.

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