

Things to Add to Faith: KNOWLEDGE

In the Book of Genesis, God turned to Adam and told him something about “**knowledge**”. In fact, He gave Adam a very clear and specific instruction about this. In Genesis 2, it tells us: ¹⁵ “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” ¹⁶ “And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the **knowledge of good and evil**, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’” Genesis 2:15-17 (NIV) Now isn’t that strange? Last week, we considered the Apostle Peter’s discussion about the things that we need to **add to our faith** to make it strong. Peter very clearly told us that one of those additives is “**knowledge**.”¹ But, way back in Genesis, God commands Adam not to partake of a certain tree that apparently had the fruit of **knowledge**. Now, how do we go about reconciling what we see in Genesis with what is found in Peter’s letter? Can it be that these two passages from the Bible contradict each other? . . . No!—the Bible never contradicts itself. Rather, it is when we dig deeper into what may on its surface appear difficult to reconcile that we actually find the richness of the truth of God’s Word.

Peter wasn’t kidding when he told us that we must add “**knowledge**” to our faith. And God certainly wasn’t kidding when He forbade Adam—as He also forbids you and me—to abstain from eating from the “**tree of knowledge of good and evil**.” The important thing is to realize exactly what kind of **knowledge** that worldly “**tree**” stands to offer, and to clearly understand what both God and Peter mean when they speak of **knowledge**.

So, let’s think about this “**tree of knowledge**” and why we need to turn away from it. Ask yourself where was the Garden of Eden located? Well, it was located here in this world. So where was this **tree of knowledge** rooted? Again, it is rooted in the **soil of this world**. And so, this particular tree’s fruit of **good and evil** drew its sustenance from the moral soil of this world itself—**not from God**. And so, God gave Adam and Eve a choice as to who’s moral standards they would follow—those of God, and live, or those of the world, and die. And with a little persuasion from Satan, they chose death, instead of life with God. And humanity has been making that very same choice ever since.

So, we need to remind ourselves that it is our natural tendency to favor the world’s sense of knowledge, but to resist the knowledge that comes from God. And because of that, we typically want a **brand of knowledge** that puts us in the position of deciding what is good or what is evil. And we want to reject any knowledge to the contrary that calls us to play by God’s rules and not our own. The kind of knowledge we so often crave is the very same as that for which Adam and Eve were driven from the

Garden. It is the kind of knowledge derived from a “*desire to possess powers belonging to God alone.*” The Christian writer, Parker Palmer, exposes the chief characteristic of such people when he states that, “*They [fail] to honor the fact that God knew them first, knew them in their limits as well as their potentials. In their refusal to know as they were known, they reached for a kind of knowledge that always leads to death.*”²

Alright—if that is the knowledge that God is referring to in the Book of Genesis, and we need to turn away from it, then what is the kind of knowledge that Peter is talking about when he tells us to add **knowledge** to our faith? Well, the knowledge that Peter referred to is described in the Book of Proverbs. For example, Proverbs 1:7 says, “To have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD.” (TEV) And Proverbs 9:10 expands on this by adding: “For the reverence and fear of God are basic to all wisdom. Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding.” (TLB) This is the greatest kind of knowledge of all. This knowledge is all about **knowing God**. In fact, in the Book of Hosea, God tells His people that He doesn’t want empty religious ceremonies. Rather the Lord turns to them, and to us, and says: ⁶ “I don’t want your sacrifices—I want your love; I don’t want your offerings—I WANT YOU TO KNOW ME.” Hosea 6:6 (TLB) So, how to you go about doing that? How do you come **to know God**?

In the Old Testament, the ancient Israelites came to know God by their walk with Him through the pages of history as, time after time, God came through for them during times of difficulty and trouble. (See: Exodus 9:29; Leviticus 23:43; Deuteronomy 4:32-39; Psalm 9:10; 59:13; 78:16; Hosea 2:19-20). This wasn’t merely theoretical or factual knowledge. Rather, this was **experiential knowledge**—knowledge whereby God’s people had the full advantage of **experiencing His faithfulness** in times of trouble. Similarly, in the New Testament, we can best come to know God through our knowledge of His Son, Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus said, “If you knew Me, you would also know my Father.” John 8:19 (NLT2) Understanding this, Paul wrote: “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead.” Philippians 3:10 (NLT2) And like Peter, Paul knew the close relationship between **godly knowledge** and **faith** proclaiming that, ¹³ “With that same spirit of faith¹⁴ . . . we know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus . . .” ² Corinthians 4:13-14 (NIV)³

So, is God demanding that we abandon all other knowledge? For instance, does God advocate disbanding all educational systems?—close the universities?—burn the books? No—or course not! The great pastor and Christian writer H. A. Ironside rightly states: “**Scripture nowhere condemns the acquisition of knowledge. It is the wisdom of this world, not its knowledge, that is foolishness with God.**”⁴ God wants you to acquire knowledge—all kinds of knowledge in science, philosophy, history

and all the great educational disciples—**but do so through Him**—through the lens of His Word, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Some of these things will prove true, others false. But the point is to discern their truthfulness through a Christian worldview. For as Paul teaches: ²¹ “Put all things to the test: Keep what is good ²² and avoid every kind of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 (TEV)

And, we as Christians—particularly parents and grandparents—have an important obligation. We have the responsibility to equip our offspring with the framework of a Christian worldview by thoroughly instructing them in the teachings in God’s Word. And we are to begin doing this at a very early age, and continue on, even as those children bear offspring of their own. The Book of Deuteronomy tells us to: ⁴ “[R]emember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working.” Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (TEV) Paul writes the Ephesians saying: “Bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (NIV) And he tells Timothy: ¹⁵ “[F]rom infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:15-16 (NIV)

And we are to pass this **knowledge** on to all young people—that **knowledge** as understood within the context of the wisdom of God’s Word. The sad truth is that many in our younger generations have been left without the Word of God for so long that we are now on the verge of having several layers of generations who are devoid of the morality of Jesus Christ. Our nation is reflecting the reality of such neglect on the part of God’s people. I told our Sunday School class of a recent article that I read indicating that by the year 2050 (i.e. in about 30 years) approximately 35 million children raised in Christian homes will abandon the Christian faith.⁵ Now I know that all of that can’t be blamed upon the parents—Satan and the children themselves bear quite a bit of the responsibility for this evil state of affairs. But, we, as mature Christians, need to be more pro-active in passing on the knowledge found in God’s Word to the generations who have followed us.

And yet, once anyone receives Godly instruction—i.e., they have that **knowledge of God** that Peter spoke of—then they are responsible for applying it to their lives. And that seems to be a real problem for quite a few Christians. Not too long ago a study was done of teenagers who grew up in the church and had parents who provided them with sufficient knowledge of Jesus Christ. Of those surveyed, 9 out of 10 indicated that: (1) Their church experience did, in fact, expose them to Bible stories and teachings, (2) They were taught about the lives of great people in the Bible, and (3) While in

church, they received very positive and enjoyable experiences. The problem is this: Only a little over one-half (53% percent) of them indicated that the *knowledge* they received from the church assisted them in understanding “*the Bible enough to help them make decisions based on biblical principles.*”⁶ In other words, they knew what the Bible says, but never applied its content to the way that they lived their lives. They are really no different from Adam in Eve in that respect. They too had God’s Word, but chose to ignore it when it came down to crunch time when they were faced with either obeying God or accepting what the world says concerning what is good or evil. And, they are the ones to whom Jesus will one day turn and say, “O ye of little faith.” Matthew 8:26 (KJV) And unless they repent, Jesus will add to that by saying, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”⁷—because you never took the time to know Me and live according to My ways. And in the end, if Jesus makes that judgment, then there is no place for them to go, but to Hell.

And then there are those who are even more foolish. God has given to them great minds and brains with which to think great thoughts, and yet they remain fools. I have mentioned the late Carl Sagan before as the classic example of such intelligent fools because they refuse to know God through the medium of faith in Jesus Christ. Sagan was an astronomer and very intelligent by the standards of the world. And yet, he never really believed in God. He was fascinated that any educated adult who was exposed to the wonders of science could cling to a belief in a God based on the testimony of biblical witnesses who lived over three thousand years ago. Sagan once asked Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, who is a noted minister with standing in both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the American Baptist Church, a question. He asked, “You’re so smart, why do you believe in God?” Dr. Brown said that she was quite puzzled by this question considering the fact that people like Sagan have no trouble whatsoever accepting the existence of such astronomical mysteries as “*black holes*”—things, by the way, that no one has actually ever observed. And so Dr. Brown turned the tables a bit by asking him her own question. She replied, “You’re so smart, why don’t you believe in God?” And yet Sagan apparently died without any noticeable faith. His wife is quoted as saying, “There was no deathbed conversion. No appeals to God, no hope for an afterlife, no pretending that he and I, who had been inseparable for twenty years, were not saying good-bye forever.” And someone asked her, “But, didn’t he *want* to believe?” And his wife, an unbeliever as well, said in a defiant voice, “Carl never wanted to believe. He wanted *to know.*”⁸

There is nothing wrong with wanting “*to know.*” But, the difficulty for Carl Sagan, and for so many today, is that they only want “*to know*” by gaining their knowledge through that same old tree—the exact same one from which Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Eden. And, because of that, their

belief system becomes so twisted when they eat solely from that tree that faith in God becomes foolishness to them. But Paul comments on who are really the fools when he tells them: ¹⁸ “Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world’s standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise.” ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, “He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness.” 1 Corinthians 3:18-19 (NLT2) In others words, such people as Sagan have ears to hear, eyes to see⁹ and brains to think, and yet they neither hear, see nor believe the truth—all to their eternal demise. I have to wonder if A. W. Tozer didn’t have Carl Sagan in mind when he wrote: **“Modern mankind can go anywhere, do everything and be completely curious about the universe. But only a rare person now and then is curious enough to want to know God.”**¹⁰ And King Solomon was certainly writing about all the Carl Sagan’s who would come to populate the pages of history when he wrote: ²⁹ “Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, ³⁰ since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, ³¹ they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.” Proverbs 1:29-31 (NIV)

So, the question remains: From which tree will you pick your fruit?—that fruit of **knowledge upon which your salvation depends**—that fruit upon which your faith needs to feed upon. Will it be from the tree that grows in this world?—the one that ultimately leads to death. Or, will it be from a different tree?—the best tree, the one that brings eternal life.¹¹ Knowledge in that tree leads us to know several important things. It will lead you to know Jesus. And if you know Jesus, He will lead you to understand your own wretched sinfulness. And when you come to know that, you will come to know God—and you’ll understand that your need for His mercy and forgiveness is made possible through Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross. And by hanging on that tree for us, Jesus became the **tree of our salvation** from which an amazing vine extends, for Jesus says: ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” John 15:5-6 (NIV) And finally, Blaise Pascal sums up what this **true knowledge** is all about when he tells us: **“The knowledge of God without that of our wretchedness creates pride. The knowledge of our wretchedness without that of God creates despair. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the [only] way, because in Him we find both God and our wretchedness.”**¹²

And so, follow the advice of the Apostle Peter and **add the knowledge of God to your faith** today. And when you do that your faith can’t help but to grow strong. Who knows—you might even convince a Carl Sagan or two along the way to come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And what a blessing your faith will be!¹³ Let us pray.

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¹ 2 Peter 1:5 (NIV) [M]ake every effort to *ADD TO YOUR FAITH* goodness; and to goodness, *KNOWLEDGE*.

² Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known* (HarperOne, 1993), pp. 25 and 40; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, California PreachingToday.com.

³ Roger L. Omanson, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "KNOWLEDGE," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

⁴ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on Colossians*. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 8. PreachingToday.com.

⁵ Samuel Smith, "Report projects 35 million youth to leave Christianity by 2050; Greg Stier responds," <https://www.christianpost.com> (September 24, 2019).

⁶ "Real Religion," Christian Parenting Today (Winter 2003), PreachingToday.com.

⁷ Matthew 7:23 (NIV)

⁸ Jerry Adler, "Unbeliever's Quest," *Newsweek* (March 31, 1997), from Larson Ten Elshof's *1001 Illustrations That Connect*, (Zondervan, 2008).

⁹ Mark 8:17-18 (NIV) Jesus asked them: ¹⁷ . . . "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?

¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

¹⁰ A. W. Tozer in *Renewed Day by Day*. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 12. Elesha Hodge, comp., *Volumes 1-4*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "KNOWLEDGE".

¹¹ Genesis 2:9 (NIV) ⁹ And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹² Blaise Pascal in *Pensees* (trans. Kegan Paul). Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 9. Elesha Hodge, comp., *Volumes 1-4*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "KNOWLEDGE".

¹³ John 14:12-14 (NIV) ¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask Me for anything in my name, and I will do it.