

KNOWLEDGE VS LOVE

Genesis 3: 1-7; 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

Jackie's patience was wearing thin. Charles, her husband, and Danny, her son, were at it once again. Now that Danny was a growing teenager, he was also becoming a smart-aleck. He had fantastic grades in school and seemed to have a brilliant future full of promise. His dad, Charles, was also a highly intelligent man. But given the necessities of life, having to work from a young age to make a living, and not having had the best educational opportunities, he was not living his full potential through his work. Danny's quickly rising success was a bit of a threat. "You think you're so smart, eh? You think you know everything! Well let me tell you the way things were when I was growing up and my father and grandfather before me!" Danny had heard all this before. When was his dad going to give it up? "I know, I know," replied Danny. "I know all about the depression and the 2nd world war and you growing up in a working class neighbourhood. I've read about it and I've learned about it in history class. I know I've had opportunities you have not had. But just because I haven't been through things like that, doesn't mean I don't know what it's like to have a tough time." "You?" replied Charles, "a tough time? What do you know about tough? You just think you know everything because you read it in books. You just think that you can get all the knowledge you ever need by looking it up on the internet? You know little if you ask me!"

Jackie knew what was going on. Danny was now growing up and he was challenging his father's authority. Sadly, in the process he was putting his father down. Charles, on the other hand, was being forced to face his own disappointments, shortcomings and lost opportunities, as he watched his son growing with a promising future ahead of him. How would all this play itself out in the years to come?

I don't know if you've ever encountered this kind of family dynamic. I, for one, have seen this kind of thing in many a family. Knowledge, or the claim of knowledge, becomes a tool to get power over others and feel superior to others. The person who knows is the person who's got confidence and control. Is it any surprise then that in our advanced scientific, technological age, knowledge is held up as the god above gods? To know is to rule. Sure there is political, economic, and military power. But knowledge is far greater because it is knowledge which makes things, discovers, invents and develops things, unlocks mysteries and finds ways to manipulate and change the world to human advantage. Knowledge is the true god, for knowledge is the way to true power that doesn't require force or intimidation to recognize it. Is it any wonder that our educational system, from primary school onwards,

has been steadily shifting focus away from the artistic, spiritual and contemplative toward the informational and technical? It is technical knowledge that is acknowledged as priority. This is because we see information about the world and technology to shape the world as our means to salvation as a civilization.

But is this so? Is our salvation as a civilization to be found in this kind of informational and technical knowledge? Long ago, the philosopher Socrates said something different about knowledge. He said: the truly wise person is the person who knows how little they know. Humility about what you know is more valuable than demonstrating what you know. And this approach to knowledge leads to wisdom, because it leads the seeker to openness, wonder and awe, qualities much more valuable to learning than information. Openness, wonder and awe also lead to love, and the deepest kind of knowledge can only come when we come to love that which we seek to know - loving something or someone rather than seeking to control, manipulate and use them. That's the path to true knowledge. But why use the word 'love' for this kind of knowing? What does love really have to do with knowledge? Loving may be a really nice thing to have in life, something to make life cozy, sweet and warm, but the kind of knowledge we really need in our world is the kind that can make things, change things, predict things and control things. Really? Is informational and technical knowledge really our salvation, or do the ancients have something to teach us moderns?

Consider where knowledge divorced from love has brought us as a civilization? Can a biologist who speaks about trees in purely objective, non-loving terms tell us why it's so important to care for trees beyond their utility to human welfare? Can anyone tell us why we must love and reverence the earth if it is just raw material for our utility or self-interest? How can we talk of beauty, of wonder, of awe, of faith and trust, without infusing our knowing with loving? Indeed, without love, knowledge is a dangerous thing. Knowledge is what makes weapons as much as it makes medicines. And knowledge about medicines without love, allows people to falsify experiments and distort data for the sake of profit and market advantage.

Knowledge without love makes all kinds of products without recognizing the cost to our environment, our atmosphere, the well-being of future generations, or the well-being of people in less prosperous parts of the earth. Indeed, knowledge without love can only lead to destruction. Certainly there is the rule of law. Law is there to protect and enforce well-being because of the knowledge that people will not do the right thing out of love. But law alone can never solve the world's problems, nor can it atone for every wrong done. Love

and love alone, must be the foundation and purpose. As Christians, this must be the gospel we proclaim by our lives, our attitudes, our words and our votes.

But now that I've brought Christianity into it, let us consider the revelatory wisdom of the bible, and in particular, let us focus on our reading from Genesis. The story of the first humans is not meant to tell us scientifically about how the world began. Rather, it is meant to tell us morally and spiritually how we were made to live. There is us with God and there is us with each other and the earth – a three way relationship. What happens when this relationship breaks down? What causes the breakdown? We are told that human beings were made *ex amore* – out of love. God's motivation for creating the universe and all that is in it is not knowledge, sport, fun, or a relief of boredom. No. God's motive in creating the world is love. And love seeks relationship. Love seeks to find ways to commune with others who can respond. Love seeks reciprocity. God made the world and God made us so that God could love that which is alive and is truly other than God.

What use is love if there is not something or someone who is truly other which a person can love? And our purpose as human beings arises accordingly. We are told that we are made in God's image. This means that we, too, are made for love, for relationship. We are made for relationship with God who is the source of everything. We are made for relationship with other humans. We are made for relationship with the earth and all its creatures. And the core value that should sustain these relationships is not knowledge. Rather, the core value, the core motive, the core ground of such relationships ought to be love. Love is the primary thing. No matter how smart or how dull we are, no matter which creatures are more intelligent and which are less so, love makes no distinctions according to utility or grade point average. Life is absolutely valuable, and no life can be treated without reverence and thanksgiving, even when it includes the necessity of killing in order to eat. Reverence and thanksgiving for the privilege of nourishment is something that can always be done better, more humanely and sustainably, if we love all creatures and our mother earth.

But what happens in Genesis as the story progresses? By chapter 3 we have the first humans who are not satisfied with loving. Love involves trust. Love involves giving up control and autonomy in order to share, give and depend on each other. But knowledge is about power and control, power and control to shape my destiny, **MY** destiny: "God knows," the serpent tells them, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, **knowing** good and evil."

You will know so you don't need to depend on God. And the more you know, the more you can become autonomous and independent of the other life around you. You can manipulate

and shape everything around you, using it to enhance your own life. You can be your own gods. And we know how the story ends, don't we? Not only does this knowledge of good and evil make them grow up fast, but it makes them more anxious about life, more mistrusting and more fearful. To turn away from love, even if it be in the name of knowledge, leads to disaster. In fact, knowledge without love only intensifies the disaster because it gives people tools to harm, oppress and destroy, be those tools a gun which can kill outright, or a degree which can make people think they're so smart and put others down because of it.

Certainly, Adam and Eve do gain some knowledge from their experiment in eating from the forbidden tree. They gain the knowledge of how small, how weak and how vulnerable they are in this vast universe. Without God, without relationships under-girded by love, there is mistrust, suspicion and fear. This is symbolized by the fact that Adam and Eve go into hiding and try to cover up their nakedness. Nakedness and the need to hide is a reflection of anxiety, fear, lack of trust and shame, because the world is a threatening and dangerous place. The solution out of this mess, then, is not greater knowledge. Greater knowledge leads to greater power of some who use it over others and exacerbate the fear, mistrust and oppression that our human civilization has become so expert developing.

Love, on the other hand, as the apostle tells us, "builds up." Love, when it is sought and nourished, builds up trust, relationship, community and hope. And any knowledge that is gained is focused on building community, sharing, giving and fostering a sense of well-being for others. When others are cared for, a person also finds peace and joy in oneself.

As Christians, may we find ways not to be swayed by the world's worship of technical and informational knowledge. May we hold up love as the be all and end all; for we were made out of love and for love. That is our essence as human beings. For this is the essence of the God we worship as Creator, as Spirit and as the enfleshed embodiment of love that is Jesus Christ.

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" declares the apostle. Knowledge is critical for us as a species, but unless knowledge is in the service and under the dominion of love, it will destroy our ever more fragile planet, more and more species, and eventually us. Love demands that we don't go down certain roads of knowledge and technology. Love demands restraints, sacrifices and simplicity of life so that other life may flourish. Love must rule or else we will all die physically even as we are shrinking spiritually. May God find a way into more and more human hearts before it is too late. Our future generations depend on what we do and how we live today. Amen.