

# The knowledge of God

By Garry W. Johnson

MOUNTAIN REVIEW

Most readers of this article belong to an exclusive yet ever-growing group: convicts. We are the unfortunate few who have chosen to learn the hard way. Well, maybe we didn't *choose* to learn this way, but this is the situation we find ourselves. Some of us are learning how to be better criminals; some are bettering ourselves through philosophy, religion and/or education; some are learning nothing at all. This article is written, however, for a much smaller group: those of us who are finding the knowledge of God.

I make the distinction between this knowledge and religion because they are too often very different things. Not all that speak of God are godly, and not every spirit that moves the heart is holy. Satan is referred to as "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Scripture says he is "transformed into an angle of light," and his ministers into "the ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). That's one reason the knowledge of God is so important, it reveals these imposters for who and what they are. That's also why it's so strongly resisted.

Paul told Timothy that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Scripture is that divine truth that "came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit reveals the knowledge of God to His people, just as it did to the apostles and prophets. As God dose not change (Hebrews 18:8; Malachi 3:6) His revelations are never contrary to His Word, no matter how He chooses to get His point across to us.

## Curious curriculum

God's method of teaching always amazes me when I realize it's happening. This article is based on a message I delivered in the chapel on the minimum-security compound in November 2009. It's the product of several weeks of God's leading in subjects and thoughts that appeared and reappeared in my environment, in my mind and especially during the Inmate Service, 11:00 a.m. on Saturdays.

As I researched subjects for that service, writing as I went, week after week I would find myself in the chapel listening to another man explain to the congregation what I had been learning. As a final confirmation, the week I was wrapping-up my research I received a Bible College lesson covering most of the same subjects we'll be discussing in this article, using many of the same scriptures and allusions. I shared copies of that study with everyone present in the chapel that day.

I also shared them that I had recently made some efforts to relocate from the compound. I sought transfer first to the annex and, when that didn't workout, to the A&D program in building 21, where I temporarily ended up.

Over the past couple of years I have taken to myself a lot of projects, assumed a lot of responsibilities and tried to fill in the gaps in places where I could see deficiencies. These self-imposed enterprises brought to light for me many inequities in the system, unjust treatment and complexities in dealing with people in the prison setting. They taught me a lot about human nature, and I became discouraged. The knowledge of man often has that effect. Solomon said, "...he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrows" (Ecclesiastes 1:18b).

I had not even intended on speaking publicly again until I was relocated, but at that time God did not seem willing to let me go anywhere. I find that when my plans stall, God is often trying to point something out that my natural mind has overlooked, and He is persistent.

Will and Brandon, two of our newest and youngest ministers, cornered me in the chow hall two weeks before about covering the service that day and in doing so they reminded me that this particular responsibility is not of ourselves but of God. And it has always been by way of the inmate ministers that I have found the drive to keep coming up to the services and speaking, no matter what else was happening in my life.

I was brought into the inmate ministry through Rickey Beamon, who is himself in the A&D program now. He started out asking me to help him prepare for a message or two. Then he convinced me to do a 10 to 15-minute introduction on the subject he was covering one morning. Others ministers followed his lead, until the time came when I was comfortable enough to do an entire lesson.

And that is how I see these services, I see them as lessons, an opportunity for us to learn from each other, to gain from the knowledge we have each obtained through our relationship with the Father. Learning of God is the very basis of true worship.

I do not go to the chapel or write these articles in an attempt to sell you anything. I am not trying to convince you that God is, or that He is calling you to repentance. If God has called you, you will seek out His truth, and there is only one place you can get that truth without question – the Word of God.

My job is to proclaim truth, to relay the knowledge of the truth revealed to me, and to try and make the truth as plain as I can. Whether you believe it or not, whether you accept it or not, is between you and your God.

I also do not try to invoke an emotional response from my listeners or readers. I am not concerned with how you *feel* about the truth, or what you *feel* the truth is. The only feelings that are important to me are that you love God, that you love one another, that you fear your Creator and that you hate sin. If these things are true of you then *the truth itself* will move you, no matter how I present it.

#### TRUE EDUCATION REVEALED

Those of you who have studied God's love – the love He commands us to share, that *agapē* love – you know, as Vine's says, it "is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered." In other words, it is often undeserved by the recipient, as God's love towards us is. When we share that love with each other, it is not an emotion – it's a decision.

"By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God, and keep His commandments," the Apostle John said. "For this *is* the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:2-3). The law is not grievous – unless you are living in transgression of it.

The Bible tells us that, "sin *is* transgression of the law," 1 John 3:4. And the Author of that law, the "I AM" of the Old Testament [John 8:58 / Exodus 3:14], told His disciples that they should "love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). Anything less in a disciple of Christ is sin.

The law, the commandments of God, tell us what sin is, they reveal the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). But if you have no respect for God, if you ignore His law, then this knowledge remains a mystery to you. The Word of God taught Solomon that "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).

As Solomon would find out and explain in great detail through the book of Ecclesiastes, and Christ would later reiterate throughout His earthly ministry, this instruction can only be obtained from one Source, the Father God. That was the Source that Christ credited with all His knowledge [John 8:28]. He is the divine Source from which the Word of God is drawn.

Solomon closed his writing with this warning, "...of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this *is* the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:12b-13). Solomon spent much of his life seeking the knowledge, the wealth and the pleasures of this existence, only to find that it was all vanity; that only God has the answers. And Solomon was not alone.

#### NATURAL KNOWLEDGE

Man has always desired knowledge. God made us inquisitive creatures, always searching for answers. Inquisitive means *inclined to ask many questions or seek information; eager to learn*.

God made us in His image, after His likeness: that is because God is inquisitive too, mostly about us. After creating Adam He brought to him all the living creatures "to see what he would call them" (Genesis 1:26). That is why we are here, so God can see what we will do with what He has given us. God gives commands, and He reveals Himself to us through those commands to see what we will do.

He told Adam, "You can eat from every tree in the garden, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die" (chapter 2:17). God had revealed to Him proper knowledge – do not eat from the tree, it will kill you. Adam rejected God's knowledge and chose to substitute his own, and that is where sin entered in. Not because man sought knowledge, but because he rejected the knowledge he was given.

Adam was not deceived – he chose to sin – to reject the knowledge of God and take to himself the knowledge of good and evil. People who reject God often say that we all naturally know right from wrong – that the knowledge is already ours. They believe this life is just that simple. This is the simplicity of fools.

Solomon ask, "How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" Wisdom cries out, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (Proverbs 1:22, 23). God made His words known to Adam, yet Adam refused the wisdom of his Creator, to turn aside from sin.

Eve, however, she was deceived. She could not accept the simplicity of God's command. Like so many today that hate God's law, she had the desire to *reason around* His commandment, questioning His integrity and intent. "Surely God must have some other motive – His commandments can't really be for our own good. Surely He didn't mean *exactly* what He said."

The serpent supplied her an ulterior motive, Genesis 3:5 – "...God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." And there is the natural additive – we believe we know as much as God, and therefore, we do not *need* the knowledge He offers through His Word. "...the

carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). Our society today continues in this false knowledge.

I recently finished a book on the way advertising has shaped modern culture. The author, James Twitchell, makes continuous comparisons to the cult of modern advertising and the methods of the false church to promote religion. Of course he does not realize it is a false church. The author considers everyone who claims the name of Christ to be Christian, regardless of their deeds. But nevertheless, his history is dead-on.

Twitchell recounts how ecclesiastical courts stemmed the principles of supply and demand by sumptuary laws. That is how the priest kept off-limits to the commoners certain luxuries of the upper classes – the clergy and the king’s court, citing the sins of excess and gluttony. Today our government uses excise taxes on yachts, expensive cars and other high-end items much the same way.

He reminds us that Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* on the Sistine Chapel was a piece of commercial art, religious advertisement, commissioned on rite by the Pope. He draws the comparison between the merchandising of relics in the dark ages and the prayer cloths, medallions and other such religious non-sense shamelessly marketed by TV evangelist.

Couple that with the books of “insight,” the “must-have” videos and sermon tapes for sale, or in trade for the “suggestion donation” of \$29.99, and you have to wonder if they even know Christ instructed His disciples, “freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). They must have received theirs from a *different* source.

Twitchell also shows how big business has co-opted supposedly Christian celebrations to hock their wares. He recounts how Thomas Nast, *Harper’s Weekly* and the Coca-Cola Corporation designed our modern depictions of Santa Clause through market research. Today’s Santa has a job, he is a salesman, a corporate stooge, and greed continues to fuel this holiday once outlawed in American colonies.

He also sheds light on the millions companies like Nestl , Mars and Hershey pour each year into advertising and promoting Easter, Valentines and Mother’s Day, expending much more capital and manpower than the churches ever do. Pop-religion is big business, and each interest promotes that which makes them the most money.

Twitchell also made a connection for me I had never picked up on before about one of the Macintosh Corporation logos. In a comment about the logo of a multicolored apple with a bite missing out of it he simply says, “Knowledge consumed.” We’re still chewing on that apple guys, and most of the time we cannot tell the difference.

#### **TRUE KNOWLEDGE**

God tells us to reject anyone or anything “that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God...” (2 Corinthians 10:5) and to depend on His Word and His Spirit for guidance. He gives us His commandments in writing; in stone; in flesh; in print. He explains and amplifies. He reiterate and extrapolates. He magnifies the law and makes it honorable (Isaiah 42:21). But like Eve, we just cannot believe it is that simple.

We cannot just take His Word at face value. We have to interpret it. We have to turn to the “church fathers,” to theology; we have to find out what people 1,700 years ago believed about the material we have right in front of our faces. They were looking at the same documents we have today. God does not change. His Spirit is consistent. But we had rather listen to the interpretation than the Author.

We do not like what we are commanded, so we find someone to tell us something we do like. Someone to explain what God meant. Tell us His motive. And we somehow believe that if the interpretation is old, it must be reliable. Satan, after all, was around well before Adam.

I can assure you that anything you want to believe about God or the Bible or human existence, you can find some idiot, somewhere, in some period of time, usually with some great measure of authority, who will back you up. But it is *the life of the disciple* that witnesses to his understanding, not his words, or his knowledge of history, or his seemingly deep insights – it is *his conformity to Scripture* that is the test. It is *his attitude* toward the word of God.

Millions of professing Christians see themselves as judges and critics of the Bible. There are countless “amateur theologians” who “interpret” the Bible to suit themselves. I run into them all the time. Some are professing Christians, some pagans, some atheists, but each finding exactly what they intended from the “good book.”

Some nominal Christians will accept certain points of truth grudgingly, suspiciously, if they cannot readily locate their favorite “proof text” to the contrary. Others will argue non-existent points, make up Scriptures that are “in there somewhere,” and jab with snide comments when they have nothing else to stand on. All such arguments with a deceived individual are vain.

What these people do not realize is that they are approaching the Bible with a carnal mind. They fail to understand that it is the Holy Spirit alone that removes the veil of deception, not their own wit or cunning or knowledge. They are still looking through the keyhole, instead of allowing God to throw open the door. And He will throw the door open, if we will just let go of the knob.

And when truth is presented to them they respond as the Bereans, but with a negative attitude – they search the Scripture diligently to see if these things are NOT so! Many of the Bereans believed, because they received the truth

“with all readiness of mind” – they had a *positive* disposition toward what they heard, “Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men not a few” (Acts 17:11, 12).

God says, “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:1, 2). Do you *tremble* before the divine Word of God?

Most people place themselves above the Bible. *They* will decide. *They* will determine. *They* will “prove all things” by their own standard. Instead, people should see the Bible as far, far above them, and God, as the Source of the Bible, far above it.

Jesus Christ, speaking of little children, said, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (Mark 10:15). It requires a miracle from God to open an antagonistic, resentful, carnal mind. Jesus Christ said, “No man *can* come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

We should never attempt to cram our religion down some else’s throat. All it does is alienate the very people we hope to help. Rather we should be quietly thankful and praise God when He reveals to us His truth, then strive to live shining examples of goodness, meekness, gentleness and faith.

Repentance means to change. It means turn around and go the other way. And when loved ones see remarkable *CHANGE* in our lives, they become impressed by the *example* they see. No amount of preaching, arguing, or attempting to explain new truth to them will have the same effect. Nothing will get through to them until they *want* to hear, *want* to know, as a result of God’s leading. Always remember that “A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still.”

#### TRUE TEACHERS

A few years ago a guy tried to sell me on “dispensationalism.” As it was pitched to me, it is the idea that certain parts of the Bible do not apply to you and me. That other parts are meant for certain other people, but only in the future and that you have to know which parts of Scripture are for who and in what dispensation of time they apply in order to properly understand what the Bible is saying. It is an exercise in futility – an illusion of interpretation.

And that is what popped into my mind the other day when I ran across the word “dispensation” in a text, one I have probably read a hundred times. But this time the term stood out to me so I researched its meaning. But before we go into that, lets look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:16.

In this epistle Paul is recounting how he took no payment for his bring of the gospel message to the Corinthian church. You see, people who gather in churches, synagogue and mosque by their very attendance claim to be receptive to truth. Some are, others are not, and some are there simply for strife. But Paul always took the seekers at their word, and in this epistle he reveals to them his driving force, his *motivation* for bringing the good news to Corinth.

Paul says in verse 16: “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16-18).

Paul was willing to preach the gospel for free – he was not looking for admiration or acknowledgement, he was not a “man-pleaser.” In fact, he, like his Master, was rejected and eventually killed for the truth he brought. And the truth remains the same; it is still dangerous; still rejected; still unpopular.

Dispensation in this text is from the Greek *oikonomia* /*oy-kon-om-ee'-ah*/, it means *administration* (of a household or estate); spec. a (relig.) “economy” – dispensation (x4), stewardship (3x) (Strong’s 3622). It is the responsibility of God’s work to distribute His knowledge to those who seek it.

It is through the reception and application of God’s knowledge that man is saved, both in this world and the next. Christ lamented over the Israelites, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to Me: seeing thou has forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hosea 4:6). That knowledge was embodied in the ministry of Christ and sent throughout the world by the New Testament Church.

In Colossians 1, verse 25, Paul says, “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man in all wisdom: that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.

“For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* And this I say, lest any man beguile you with enticing words” (Colossians 1:25 - 2:4).

Nearly 2000 years ago they were already men among the Church who would beguile, which means deceive, with enticing words – concepts attractive to the flesh. The New Testament is loaded with references to them, wolves in sheep’s clothing [Matthew 7:15; 10:16; Luke 10:3; Acts 20:29]. They and their master have plagued God’s people from the beginning. Eve fell to the deception, Israel fell to it, Judah fell, and the Mother of all harlots [Revelation 17:5] along with all of her daughters and all of her ministers, have taken the bait. She’s gone the way of her predecessors, the priest and rulers of the temple.

Jesus Christ said, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), and He referred to both the Israelites [Psalms 78:53; Jeremiah 13:17; etc.] and the New Testament Church as His flock, “and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice” (v.4). But the Pharisees were no longer domesticated sheep, but wild. They had become wild by rebellion, past down through generations of pride, through disconnect with the Good Shepherd.

Like all domesticated animals, given enough time in the wilderness, enough separation from the fold (or in their case, from the truth) they revert back to their natural state. They could no longer hear the voice of the Shepherd. He was not speaking their language.

For so long they had trusted in their own knowledge, the traditions they’d gather from one another, the spin their caretakers, their “church fathers” had put on God’s Word, that when the Shepherd called, they asked Him, “What are your credentials? Who are you to come in here and teach us? We’re not going to listen to just anybody! This knowledge of Yours isn’t what we teach!” And they were right: His was the Knowledge of God, and theirs was simply the understanding of the flesh. It is this type of knowledge that puffs up. Though it is biblical in content, its nature is deceptive, its motive is selfish; it is devoid of love. Paul told the Corinthians, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity, (love) edifieth” (1 Corinthians 8:1).

He goes on to explain in chapter 13, that, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (have not love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, *and all knowledge*: and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity (love), I am nothing.”

Verse 4, “[Love] suffereth long, and is kind: [love] envieth not; [love] vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth” (vv.4-6).

Jesus said of His followers, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” And He asked His Father to “Sanctify them (consecrate them, set them apart) through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

#### **TRUE STUDENTS**

So I beg you, get in the Word today. Search out the true knowledge, the Knowledge of God. There is nothing more important to your spiritual well being and relationship with the Father than the knowledge He reveals by His Spirit, in His Word. It is the ultimate tester of truth, and the only Church history that is irrefutable, unmistakable and undeniable.

This world is thick with deception – it was thick in the first century, and it is even thicker now. Paul told the Corinthians, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, *yet not in knowledge*; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things” (2 Corinthians 11:3:6).

That manifestation of the Church is recorded for you in the pages of your Bible, and that knowledge – the only true knowledge – rest in the pages of Scripture. God told Hosea, “...I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

Paul told the Philippian, “Ye doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

And Solomon reveals the spirit we must have and the effort we must exert: “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3-4). It is my prayer

today that you ignore the distractions and ideas of this world, open your hearts and find the true knowledge, the knowledge of the Almighty God. Amen. *MR*