

# Beware of the Pride of Reasoning; the True Guide to Knowledge Is Love.

by Francois Fenelon

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*The true guide to knowledge is love, and we must beware of the pride of reasoning and the dangers of excessive intellectualism.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 13:9, Proverbs 3:5, Matthew 11:25, John 8:36, 1 Corinthians 7:31

**Topics:** "Humility Before God", "Spiritual Guidance"

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## Description

Francois Fenelon warns against the pride of reasoning, emphasizing that true knowledge is guided by love. He cautions against being overly occupied with external matters and engaging in endless argumentation, as it hinders one's ability to focus on God. Fenelon encourages humility, simplicity, and being recollected before God, rather than getting lost in endless reasonings and dangerous curiosity that lead away from grace. He stresses the importance of being faithful in what one knows, distrusting the intellect that can mislead, and focusing on the eternal truth of God.

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## Transcript

LETTER XXX.

Beware of the pride of reasoning; the true guide to knowledge is love.

Your mind is too much occupied with exterior things, and still worse, with argumentation, to be able to act with a frequent thought of God. I am always afraid of your excessive inclination to reason; it is a hinderance to that recollection and silence in which He reveals Himself. Be humble, simple, and sincerely abstracted with men; be recollected, calm, and devoid of reasonings before God. The persons who have heretofore had most influence with you, have been infinitely dry, reasoning, critical, and opposed to a true interior life.

However little you might listen to them, you would hear only endless reasonings and a dangerous curiosity, which would insensibly draw you out of Grace and plunge you into the depths of Nature. Habits of long standing are easily revived; and the changes which cause us to revert to our original position are less easily perceived, because they are natural to our constitution. Distrust them, then; and beware of beginnings which, in fact, include the end. It is now four months since I have had any leisure for study; but I am very happy to forego study, and not to cling to anything, when providence would take it away.

It may be that during the coming winter I shall have leisure for my library, but I shall enter it then, keeping one foot on the threshold, ready to leave it at the slightest intimation. The mind must keep fasts as well as the body. I have no desire to write, or speak, or to be spoken about, or to reason, or to persuade any. I live every day aridly enough, and with certain exterior inconveniences which beset me; but I amuse myself whenever I have an opportunity, if I need recreation.

Those who make almanacs upon me, and are afraid of me, are sadly deceived. God bless them! I am far from being so foolish as to incommode myself for the sake of annoying them. I would say to them as Abraham said to Lot: Is not the whole land before thee? If you go to the east, I will go to the west. (Gen. xiii. 9.) Happy he who is indeed free! The Son of God alone can make us free; but He can only do it by snapping every bond; and how is this to be done? By that sword which divides husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister.

The world is then no longer of any account; but, as long as it is anything to us, so long our freedom is but a word, and we are as easily captured as a bird whose leg is fastened by a thread. He seems to be free; the string is not visible; but he can only fly its length, and he is a prisoner. You see the moral. What I would have you possess is more valuable than all you are fearful of losing. Be faithful in what you know, that you may be entrusted with more. Distrust your intellect, which has so often misled you.

My own has been such a deceiver, that I no longer count upon it. Be simple, and firm in your simplicity. "The fashion of this world passeth away." (1 Cor. vii. 31.) We shall vanish with it, if we make ourselves like it by reason of vanity; but the truth of God remains forever, and we shall dwell with it if it alone occupies our attention. Again I warn you, beware of philosophers and great reasoners. They will always be a snare to you, and will do you more harm than you will know how to do them good.

They linger and pine away in discussing exterior trifles, and never reach the knowledge of the truth. Their curiosity is an insatiable spiritual avarice. They are like those conquerors who ravage world without possessing it. Solomon, after a deep experience of it, testifies to the vanity of their researches. We should never study but on an express intimation of Providence; and we should do it as we go to market, to buy the provision necessary for each day's wants. Then, too, we must study in the spirit of prayer.

God is, at the same time, the Truth and the Love. We can only know the truth in proportion as we love--when we love it, we understand it well. If we do not love Love, we do not know Love. He who loves much, and remains humble and lowly in his ignorance, is the well-beloved one of the Truth; he knows what philosophers not only are ignorant of, but do not desire to know. Would that you might obtain that knowledge which is reserved for babes and the simple-minded, while it is hid from the wise and prudent. (Matt. xi. 25.)

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