

Mere Notional Knowledge

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon highlights the distinction between gracious knowledge, a gift from God, and notional knowledge, mere speculation that puffs up.

Scripture: Proverbs 2:6, 1 Corinthians 8:1, Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 3:16, James 1:22

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "True Repentance"

Description

J.C. Philpot emphasizes the crucial difference between a gracious knowledge of the truth and a mere notional knowledge, highlighting how true spiritual understanding leads to repentance, transformation, and a deep love for God's people, while head knowledge leads to deception, indulgence in sin, and a love for the world. He underscores the importance of nurturing this heavenly wisdom through the word of truth, divine promises, and the power of the Holy Spirit, which strengthen and sustain believers amidst temptations, trials, and conflicts, ultimately leading to spiritual growth and a genuine experience of God's grace.

Transcript

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The distinction that we are drawing between a gracious knowledge of the truth--and a mere notional knowledge is plain enough to every discerning child of God. He carries daily in his own bosom a test which discovers to him the difference between the knowledge which puffs up--and the knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent, which is eternal life. He deeply feels that "the anointing which teaches of all things and is truth, and is no lie," widely differs from a few speculative notions; and that the heavenly wisdom which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy," as far exceeds a natural, notional knowledge of the truth as the reality exceeds the counterfeit, and precious metal worthless dross and clay.

The one, he sees and feels, is grace, the other nature; one is spirit, the other flesh; one is power, the other form; one is light, life, liberty, and love; the other darkness, death, bondage, and enmity; by the one Jesus is revealed and made experimentally known, the kingdom of God set up in the heart, and Christ formed within, the hope of glory; by the other, pride and self are set up, the flesh pleased and gratified, and a name to live substituted for the work of faith with power. By the one, sin is repented of and forsaken; the

world put under the feet; and every fruit and grace of the Spirit brought forth into living and active exercise. By the other, the heart is deceived; the conscience hardened; sin indulged; the strong man armed kept in possession of his palace; the flesh gratified; and the world loved and eagerly pursued.

By the one, the saints of God are highly esteemed and dearly loved--their company sought after, their trials and afflictions sympathized with, their infirmities borne with, and they esteemed the excellent of the earth, with whom we wish to live and die. By the other, the real people of God are despised and hated, their company avoided, their experience misunderstood or misrepresented, and the heady, high-minded, dead, and lifeless professors preferred before them.

Need we say more? Who that has eyes to see the state of the professing church, or is favored with any spiritual discernment to distinguish between the living family of God and those who have a name to live but are dead, will not say that these things are true

The point at which we have been aiming is to show the blessedness of that spirit of wisdom and knowledge which the Lord bestows on his people and to distinguish it from that mere speculative, natural, and notional acquaintance with the truth, which is commonly called head knowledge. Now, this heavenly principle, this gracious, enlightened apprehension of the spiritual understanding, needs to be fed and nurtured that it may not gradually pine away for lack of suitable nourishment, but rather thrive and grow. Various, indeed, are the ways which the Lord employs to strengthen and sustain this heavenly principle, such as temptation, trials, afflictions, a daily cross, and a continual conflict. But his chief means, and that to which all others are but subordinate, is the word of truth. The promises applied with a divine power to the heart; the invitations and exhortations scattered up and down the sacred page; the grand and glorious truths of the everlasting gospel, shining like so many brilliant constellations in the skies of the inspired record; the testimony everywhere given in the Scriptures to the Person and work of the Son of God, from the first promise in Eden to the closing prayer, "Even so come Lord Jesus;" (Rev. 22:20;) the opening up of the word of truth by the light, life, and power of the Holy Spirit; and the sealing evidence afforded thereby that these are the true sayings of God--such is the food of that heavenly understanding which the Lord bestows on his people.

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