

Knowledge and Love

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love over knowledge, highlighting the dangers of knowledge without love and the benefits of a life guided by love.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, John 15:12-13, Romans 13:10, 1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 5:13-14, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 3:14, 1 John 4:8

Topics: "The Power of Love", "Knowledge vs. Love"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the distinction between knowledge and love, arguing that while knowledge is important, it can lead to arrogance and intolerance if not tempered by love. He illustrates how knowledge alone can make individuals dogmatic and critical, whereas love fosters compassion, patience, and understanding. Miller highlights that love is the true builder of character and relationships, encouraging us to extend grace and support to others, regardless of their past failures. He concludes that love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13, is the greatest virtue, guiding us to act selflessly and minister to those in need. Ultimately, love should inspire our actions and ambitions, making our lives meaningful and impactful.

Transcript

Knowledge, when wisdom is too weak to guide her,

Is like a headstrong horse that throws the rider.

--Quarles

One of Paul's pithy sayings is, "Knowledge puffs up--but love builds up." He does not mean to depreciate knowledge. He is not glorifying ignorance. Knowledge builds up too. It is right for us to be learners. We should always be seeking after knowledge. He who is content to be ignorant in this world, where the stores of knowledge are so accessible, fails to grasp the meaning of life. We are to read God's thoughts wherever we can find them written. Intelligence makes one's life broader and deeper. It adds to one's power of usefulness. It makes a man, more a man. We are not to understand Paul, as casting contempt upon knowledge. He himself had mastered the best knowledge of his day.

But he is speaking of a certain kind of knowledge. The eating of meats which had been offered to idols is the subject he is discussing. Those to whom he was writing had been declaring that there was nothing

wrong in eating such things. They knew that; and therefore they were not disposed to show any leniency of judgment to those who could not see the subject just as they saw it, nor to modify their own conduct in the slightest degree to suit the weak consciences of these other Christians. They knew that they themselves were right--and that was enough. Their knowledge settled the matter.

We all have seen people of this kind. They have no patience with other people's opinions--unless they agree with their own. They allow no discussion; for there can be no other right thought about a matter when they have made up their mind upon it. They quickly resent any expression of opinion that differs from their own. When they have spoken on a subject--there is to be no tolerance of any new light. There are people of this kind in every community. Their knowledge is dogmatic, tyrannical, intolerant. When it has rendered, its decision concerning any course of conduct or any question of duty--there is no appeal. Knowledge settles it.

Paul intimates, however, that knowledge does not always have the final word in settling questions of duty. There is another element which may have a preponderating influence in deciding what is right--love must have its voice. It is in such cases as he is supposing, that knowledge puffs up. It makes a man vain, arrogant, cold, and selfish. But love builds up.

The two figures in Paul's sentence suggest a puffball and a temple. The first is showy--but light, empty, without solidity. A breath can blow it away. A child's hand can crush it. It is a mere piece of inflation. But the other is strong, substantial, beautiful, enduring. The work that knowledge alone does in a life, is not good work. It lacks cohesion. It is flimsy, insecure.

Knowledge is good--when love dominates it, vitalizes it, and uses it; but love must always be the real builder. Life is full of illustrations of this truth. Without love, there is no true work on character. Knowledge alone, does not give us the skill we need in order to be a blessing to others.

We may know that a person is undeserving. We have helped him before, and nothing came of it. We know that nothing will come of any further help we may give him. He deserves only to be thrust out and left to drift. That is what mere knowledge says. But love comes in, and says, "Give him another chance." It overlooks his past falls and failures, and again extends a helping hand. No matter how often help has been given to no purpose, it must be given again. Love says the man is a brother, and never should be given up. Perhaps he may yet repent and pray, and turn to God. There may be a spark remaining in the smoking lamp, and a breath may fan it into a flame. So love toils on unweariedly, never despairing, and has its reward at last in a life saved for God and heaven. Thus love builds up--where mere knowledge leaves a life to perish.

In all our relations with others, there is the same distinction between the working of knowledge and love. Knowledge is prideful, censorious, arrogant, stern, oftentimes cold and cruel. It has no patience with other people's faults. It is intolerant of human infirmity, and treats the mistakes of human weakness or ignorance as crimes. It is relentless and unforgiving toward injury and wrong. It knows what people ought to be, how they ought to live, what perfection of character is; and it sees the smallest motes in a brother's eye--even while it carries huge beams in its own eye. Its spirit is pharisaical and critical, without a trace of forbearance or charity. It has no eye for pity, no heart for sympathy, and coldly passes by on the other side the sorest human needs. It leaves no blessing as it marches through the paths of life. No sweet flowers spring up in its path. It tramples gentle hearts under its heavy tread.

Mere knowledge only hurts and wounds and disheartens. Its breath is like a winter's blast as it blows over the tender things of life.

But in contrast with knowledge, love walks along life's paths with gentle step. Fragrant flowers grow in its path, and the air is always sweeter when it has passed by. It is kindly, thoughtful, pitiful, and compassionate. It has patience with human faults, and looks with an eye of tender love on those who have fallen. It is tolerant of others who, through weakness, err or turn aside. It is forbearing and long-suffering. It meekly endures injury and wrong, giving sweet love--in exchange for the hurts of unkindness. It sees eagerly and joyfully the good things in others, and has a wide cloak of charity for their failings and sins. It is merciful, forgiving not seven times only--but seventy times seven. Conscious of its own fault and evil--it is lenient toward the blemishes it sees in others.

Love's portrait is drawn for us in wonderful lines in Paul's immortal chapter: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love!"

Thus love is always building up. It puts some line of beauty on every life it touches. It gives new hope to discouraged ones, new strength to those who are weak; thus enabling them to go on in life's ways, when without the cheer they must have sunk down in their disheartenment. It helps the despairing to rise and start again. It makes life seem more worth while to everyone into whose eyes it looks. Its words are blessings. Its every breath is full of inspirations. It does good, and never evil, all its days. It is like God, whose name is love. It carries in its influence, a perpetual revealing of God. It goes through the world like an angel of joy and peace, singing into human hearts the songs of heaven, scattering everywhere good seeds which shall yield a harvest of righteousness.

In the purposes and ambitions of life--this same distinction between knowledge and love is manifest. Knowledge is selfish, and thinks of nothing but the attaining of its own worldly end. Everything must bend to this. Success is its animating word. It is always "fighting for position;" and it strives to climb ever upward, not scrupling to use life's relations, sometimes even its most sacred friendships, as helps toward the object of its ambition. It has no time in its days for ministries of love. It goes remorselessly on, though on its ears break the most urgent appeals for help. It knows well how to make the most of life; but always thinking only of SELF and self-aggrandizement, it cruelly pushes forward, regardless of the human needs that cry out along the way.

On the other hand, love has time for unselfishness in its busiest days--time for ministry, time for the doing of the work of Christ. It is never in such haste that it cannot stop to listen to the plea of need, and to give a blessing. It has its own plans for its days, its own ambitions, its own program of duty marked out; but when God sends his interruptions, it accepts them with patient spirit.

The most divine ministries of each day, are the things of love which God sends across our way. The half-hour the busy man takes from his business to comfort a sorrow, to help a discouraged brother to start again, to lift up one who has fainted by the way, to visit a sick neighbor and minister consolation, or to give a young person needed counsel, is the half-hour of the day that will shine the most brightly when the records of life are unrolled before God.

So we get our lesson on the superiority of love, as the guide and inspirer of life. Knowledge has its place and its power--but knowledge alone is cold and stern. It thinks only of what reason would say, of the path in which logic would lead. But love has its beating heart of tenderness, which thinks of others as well as of self, and inspires to a ministry of holy deeds, which honors God and blesses the world. Paul was right when he said that noble and beautiful as are life's gifts, the most excellent is the way of love.

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