

The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Knowledge, Proverbs 1:7

By Jay Wegter

In recent discussions with believers about the state of our nation, there is a common thread in our conversations—shock and awe over the level of moral insanity that is currently taking place. The spirit of our age is characterized by the chutzpah of the autonomous human being—namely that man makes the rules and determines reality for himself. This sentiment is graphic evidence of a complete lack of the fear of God. The scriptural rebuke is sobering: “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things; who have said, ‘With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us’” (Ps 12:3-4).

Where the fear of God is absent, there is no revering of God’s justice, and where God’s justice is forgotten, His grace and mercy will be spurned. That is a powerful summary of why the nations rage—they have willfully abandoned God who is the only source of moral truth and knowledge (Ps 2). What a contrast this abominable mindset is to the mind of the genuine believer. For those who know their God, fear Him and have fled to Him for refuge (Heb 6:18-20). The saints revere God, and therefore exalt His justice, and treasure and cherish His mercy and grace as they are found in Christ (Jn 1:17).

In this article the unbeliever’s ‘false knowledge’ will be exposed. The brilliant light of God’s Word uncovers the carnal thought forms embraced by the natural man. This is reminiscent of one of Paul’s charges to Timothy, “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly *and* empty chatter *and* the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’—which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you” (1 Tim 6:20-21).

To avoid Christ (who is God’s light) at any point in the academic pursuit is to be misled, untruthful, and spiritually deadⁱ (Greg Bahnsen). One must be *presuppositionally* committed to Christ in the world of thought or else, by default, be deluded by the persuasive arguments of the world’s philosophies (Col 2:8). All ‘Life View’ thoughts and philosophies fall into one of two categories: obedience to Christ, or captivity by the world’s philosophies (Col 2:8). In our witness, we are to press the antithesis, or contrast, between truth and error—and in doing so remove all imagined ‘middle ground’. For, without repentance, one remains in a state of foolishness, folly, and eternal darkness.

In the debate over truth, an appeal to neutrality is nothing more than a thinly veiled disguise for all-out war against the epistemic authority of Christ. By ‘Christ’s epistemic authority’ we mean that Christ, the Word of God, is the final word, the final court of appeal in terms of knowledge. In Christ Himself, all the treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col 2:3). He is Lord of all knowledge. And, as the Word made flesh, He is ultimate source of *what we know* and *how we know that what we know is true* (Jn 8:12; 14:6). The antithesis between imagined human autonomy and Christ’s authority cannot be erased.ⁱⁱ We must confront the arrogance which assumes that genuine knowledge is attainable independent of God’s direction and standards. Attempts at self-sufficiency unavoidably result in futility (Eph 4:17-19). There are only two starting points in the realm of knowledge: God or self.

God the Lord is the Originator of all truth. All our knowledge is a *receptive reconstruction* of God's primary thoughts. Intellectual self-sufficiency always leads to foolishness and delusion. According to Scripture, a 'fool' does not want to find the truth; he only wants to be justified in his vain imaginations. The fool will not leave his intellectual folly UNTIL he sees that his imagined autonomy is hostile to knowledge. "A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind" (Prov 18:2). God's unbending purpose is to make foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:18-25). God is in the *pride destruction* business. The Word of God says that one cannot know God and the world aright by means of independently exercised reason. Reverence and faith must precede the knowledge of God and what He has made. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7).

God's justice is filled with His intention to demonstrate His wrath in the form of a divine 'object lesson'. Like a public hanging; error will forever be hung on the gallows of God's justice—and will be eternally exhibited in all its ugliness and horror. Consider how men who do not fear God are oblivious to this public purpose of God to demonstrate His wrath. The Hebrew word for fear is YARAH.ⁱⁱⁱ It means to hold in honor—to be afraid—to be in awe—to worship—even to be alarmed. The word 'fear' in the context of fearing God frequently refers to the reverence and awe and respect which God's Person elicits. "Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, *and* to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good (Deut 10:12-13)? The *fear of God* is associated with obedience to His commands—*obey, walk, do, listen, hear, fear, heed*—thus fear of God is inseparable from appropriate moral conduct under the eye of God. Fear of God is also associated with an awe of God which is an essential part of true worship.

Of Job's fear of God, the Word says that he was blameless, upright, turning away from evil (Job 1:8). The fear of the Lord is wisdom. Psalms and Proverbs are the main books of the Bible dealing with the fear of God. Fear of God, wisdom, and knowledge are closely associated in Scripture. The theme of Proverbs is the wise man versus the fool. The wise man fears the Lord; the fool is lacking fear of God. In the book of Ecclesiastes, God's absolute sovereignty is a just cause for fear and reverence for God. The fear of God underlies wise decision-making (Eccl 3:14). The whole duty of man is to *fear God and keep His commandments*—consider how 'rational' this is in view of the fact that God will *bring every act to judgment; whether good or evil* (Eccl 12:13-14).

A true understanding of who God is inspires worship; even trembling (Ps 55:5-6; 90:11). The fear of God inspires moral conduct (Gen 20:11; Neh 5:15). Such fear is *imparted* to God's people in order that they might not sin. "Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin'" (Ex 20:20; Jer 32:40). The hard-hearted do not have the fear of God (Is 63:17). Jesus commands men to fear God (Lu 12:5). The fear of the Lord is the first principle of wisdom, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7). The fear of God is also associated with knowledge.

If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden treasures;

Then you will discern the fear of the Lord
And discover the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding (Prov 2:4-6).

Scripture teaches a metaphysical system—all things are of God, through God, and unto God (Rom 11:33-36). Theologically—this is “Mount Everest”—all rationality therefore is stipulated upon reasoning from this vantage point. There is no other reality.^{iv} Therefore, we must *think God’s thoughts after Him* in order to understand and interpret the world as a whole. The Bible’s *metaphysical scheme* (above) is absolutely essential for Christian Worldview. What a contrast this is to the unbeliever’s metaphysical system! The unbeliever, according to 2 Peter 3, opposes the truth of the *universal flood, the coming Kingdom of God, and the day of the Lord*. The unbeliever’s metaphysical perspective is one of uniformitarianism (*all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation*) (2 Pet 3:4).

The natural man is ‘puffed up’ by his fleshly mind, he flatters himself—patting himself on the back as he imagines he may access truth apart from fearing God. He exclaims, “I believe in science!” Thus, by trusting in his empiricism, he is confident that man may, by studious observation successfully explain all phenomena. Empiricism is woefully limited, for in its boundless optimism, it suggests that facts contain their own meaning. But, the problem is that empirical experience gives the appearance of things (the appearance of knowledge); but empiricism cannot do the following:

- It cannot correct illusions (it can’t go beyond appearances).
- It cannot open up the world of reality lying beyond the senses.
- It cannot determine the limits of possibility and impossibility.
- It cannot deal with the world as a whole, therefore, it is left with a fragmented, disunified, atomistic view of the world.
- It cannot set forth an explanation of the nature of reality.^v
- It cannot honestly take ownership of its *a priori* commitment to a set of naturalistic presuppositions (philosophic naturalism). In other words, it is willfully blind to its own philosophical system by which it identifies, gathers, correlates, and interprets facts.
- It cannot give an account of a single *transcendental*: such as truth, beauty, order, logic, rationality, morality, love, evil, etc.

Metaphysically, empiricism is capable only of reckless flights of speculation. Empiricism cannot *discover* the plan of redemption by looking at a cursed earth in which nature is red in tooth and claw and dominated by cruelty. This is sobering indeed—no wonder the reprobate, upon his damnation, is plunged into the depths of eternal confusion. To reject Scripture as the presuppositional starting point is to destroy the possibility of knowledge. As faithful proclaimers of Christ, we are to call unbelievers to abandon their suppression of the knowledge of God (Rom 1:18ff.)—to repent of their rebellious mindset and to abandon the ‘worship’ of their own imaginings.

What is the highest, ultimate standard and criterion for truth—authoritative, clearly known—validating all other proposed authorities for truth? It is the Word of God.^{vi} God the Lord interprets

everything definitively. If we want to know something as it truly is, we must think His thoughts after Him. God plans, knows, and sees all—therefore the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.^{vii} Authority over all truth, wisdom, and knowledge is part of His Lordship. He has the right to command, to tell us to obey, and to tell us what to believe. When sinners try to gain knowledge apart from the fear of the Lord, that knowledge is necessarily distorted. Why is this so? The answer is that God Almighty upholds all reality. His relationship to the creation as Maker, Owner, Upholder, Ruler, Owner, and Judge is the very essence of prime reality. We can only know God, the universe, man, and man’s place in the cosmos if we submit our minds to the mind of God found in His self-revelation—the Holy Scriptures—that is part and parcel of what it means to fear the Lord.

When we speak of the unbeliever’s knowledge being distorted we do not mean that every sentence is distorted—what we do mean is that their worldview is distorted, twisted, and unreliable—it does not correlate with reality. To make self, or something other than the God of the Bible, the final standard of truth is to commit epistemological suicide. The willful assumption of autonomous reason always results in epistemological disaster. God calls ‘*doing your own thing*’ utter foolishness. The unbeliever’s method of knowing—his epistemology—his philosophy of fact—and his criterion for truth are collectively (according to Scripture) what make him a fool. For, what any individual regards as a fact depends upon his worldview.^{viii} The autonomous man becomes his own ultimate epistemological authority—this is hostile to the Word of God and it is abhorrent to God who proclaims Himself as ultimate authority of the universe. God condemns man’s quest for independence and intellectual self-sufficiency.^{ix}

When an unbeliever sets himself up to question the Word of God as an ‘autonomous’ critic, the Word of God draws that person into judgment. God’s sure Word is the final authority and final criterion for truth. God’s Word is the ultimate authority in the world of thought. Woe to him who strives with his Maker (Is 45:9). The creature has no right to question the Creator.^x The authority of God’s Word is the necessary presupposition for all true knowledge. Rather than having God pass tests of fact, logic, beneficial effect, and subjective satisfaction, the Apostle Paul realized that logic and fact (and all other criteria) are senseless without God.^{xi} A fool trusts his own heart (Prov 28:26; 29:11; 12:15). A fool trusts his own utterances, his own opinions, and his own professed wisdom. It is impossible to arrive at truth in this way; and it is impossible to autonomously verify the Word of God. “If one does not begin with the truth of God, he cannot conclude his argumentation with either truth or God” (Greg Bahnsen).^{xii} God is ultimate self-consciousness—God’s knowledge of Himself is foundational—what He says is truth, is real, and is fact. He is self-sufficient Creator. The mind of man is not self-sufficient—we must take in the Word of God as our starting point and standard of knowledge. We must presuppose the claims of Christianity—nothing can be known if the Creator-Redeemer is not known first. The knowledge of God is the condition of rational inquiry.^{xiii}

Autonomy is destructive to human reason because autonomy makes impossible demands on finite, dependent, human intellect. In the Word of God, the knowledge of God is so certain that no reasonable man should doubt it. All the treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge are in Christ. Aside from Christ and His self-attesting Word—man can produce nothing but vanity—“the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim 6:20). Thus, the quest for certainty can be successful only

as one takes the fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge.^{xiv} As an exercise in our Christian Worldview course at The Master's University, we have the class discuss the topic, "What is a wedding?" We form two panels, then discuss the topic from a believer's and an unbeliever's perspective. It is quite a revelation of, and demonstration of the folly of autonomous reason. For, how can the unbeliever give an account of love, soul, union, covenant, sacredness, etc.?

The fear of the Lord is the only reliable 'gate of knowledge'—all other proposed gateways to knowledge put a person in a position to NOT have truth and knowledge. All other proposed gateways to knowledge (empiricism, philosophic naturalism, false religion, etc.) assume that man's reason is autonomous—in other words, that man's reasoning processes are able to attain real knowledge independent of God's infallible revelation, the Holy Scriptures.

Here is a summary of reasons why the fear of the Lord is sole gateway to truth:

- Man as the image of God is an *analog* of God. Man's mind is uniquely created to receive revelation from God. Man as *image-bearer* of God is designed by God to think His thoughts after Him. The highest man can attain to in the realm of truth is to think God's thoughts after Him.
- Man is utterly dependent upon divine revelation in order to know as he ought. What God reveals in Scripture, man could never discover through his own independent inquiry.
- Man cannot know himself in truth until he comes to know the God whom he is created to reflect.
- God structures all reality. God and His plan for His creation constitute ultimate reality. The Word of God is His revelation concerning Himself and His plan.
- Truth has no origin or existence independent of God.
- Truth is an ethical issue.

Truth is an ethical issue for the following reasons:

- Man was created with the ***capacity*** to know God. God made the knowledge of Himself evident *in them*, and evident *to them* (in creation and conscience) (Rom 1:19). There are certain attributes of God that every man knows—this knowledge of God is inescapable (Rom 1:20; Ps 19).
- God charges man with ***culpability*** for suppressing the truth of God (Rom 1:18). Sinners studiously suppress the knowledge of God that they have been given. Because they work to suppress the knowledge of God that they already possess, they are without excuse (1:20). Man is eternally responsible with what he does with both general and special revelation.
- Those who suppress the truth bear the ***consequence*** of their willful sin (Rom 1:18). The wrath of God is revealed against their ungodliness and unrighteousness. Suppressing the truth calls forth the wrath of God against them because they hold down the truth in unrighteousness.
- God paid an infinite ***cost*** to put men back in possession of the truth. Christ is God's truth incarnate. Christ is God's eternal utterance (Word) made flesh. Nothing less than the death of the Son of God in the sinner's place can remove the darkness and enmity from men's minds and hearts (2 Cor 4:4-6). Regeneration, purchased for God's people at the cross of Christ is the *resetting* of the mind to receive God's truth.

Questions & discussion points that can be used to uncover the folly of the unbeliever's worldview:

- Is there anything in creation that can't happen by itself? Is there anything in creation that gives massive evidence of being designed instead of coming into existence by chance? If biblical creation were true, what would we expect to see? (These questions answer the materialistic assumption that chance did it all—*that the universe made itself; sustains itself; interprets itself.*)
- Why is evil in the world if God made it? (The answer to this question is one of the major themes of Scripture—make sure you can answer this by explaining that sin, death, and suffering are not 'normal' but are cruel intruders because of man's revolt.)
- Did you know that God has made it very clear in His Word, the penalty for disobeying God is *de-evolution* (*the decay of our bodies, the human genome, the creation itself, as well as the truth*) not upward *evolution*. (Because of human sin, the creation has been 'dragged down' into corruption, death, disease, injustice, suffering, and extinction—Romans 8:19-25. Romans chapter one is the record of the *de-evolution* of truth—the Word of God records the origin of the world's religions as the *de-evolution* of the truth. They knew God but exchanged the truth of God for the lie.)
- When we think of evidence that something designed, consider that a boomerang does what wood does not normally do—*it comes back when it is thrown!* Why does it come back when you throw it? What is the evidence in a boomerang for a designer? (This practical, simple question can turn the conversation to the subject of God's plan and design for all He has made. How much more simple is a boomerang compared to any part of a living cell?)
- What categories in creation are admissible as support for an Almighty Intelligent Designer, a Creator? (If they say, "None!" you can point out that they have a core assumption that chance and the impersonal are ultimate. They have made that assumption on faith alone without proof.)
- The ingredients in DNA (sugars, phosphates, bases) do not make codes by themselves. Have you ever considered how complex these codes in DNA really are? Are you suggesting that DNA not only programmed its own codes, but also developed the software to read those codes? (Point out that even the simplest software program has a designer—how much more infinitely complex is the program in DNA that is responsible for the construction of the human eye?)
- Do you know what you believe happens to a person after death? How did you come to that conclusion? Do you have a good reason for rejecting Christ's testimony concerning this question? Has anyone ever talked to you about your conscience and your soul? (May I invite you to 'step into Christian Worldview' for a moment to explain what God says about this important matter?)
- If you were to set out to find God, to discover His existence, how would you proceed? Do you know what God's Word says about finding God? (Do you know why God's initial contact point with us is our sin and rebellion—because according to God's Word, that's the condition in which God finds us—dead, stuck, rebellious, unable to help ourselves. God reveals Himself in the gospel of Christ which is the revelation of His righteousness—Romans 1:16-17; 2:23-26)

- Has anyone ever shown you from the Bible why you are accountable to God? (Because you are made in the *image of God*—you have been designed by God for a specific purpose. And you will only come to know that purpose, as well as recover that purpose, through the Lord Jesus Christ.)
- May I show you from God’s Word what it is about this life and the afterlife that you could never know apart from God’s revelation, the Bible? (Answers the objection, *I won’t believe it unless I see it for myself.*)
- May I show you from Scripture why death is such a serious issue? (Explain that the sting of death is sin—1 Corinthians 15:55-57, and that Christ alone, by His sacrifice removes the sting of death. Christ’s resurrection connects mankind to eternity—His resurrection demands that there is an eternal existence! His resurrection is the only possible conquest of our greatest enemy—death. His resurrection is the Father’s endorsement of His cross-work for sinners. You are dead without His resurrection—death will destroy your soul forever in hell apart from Christ’s work.)
- What do you think of Christ? Who is He and why did He come to earth? (May I show you from God’s Word? Christ is the only *means* of knowing God. Christ is God’s *message* to sinners. Christ is the *manifestation* of God—what He is like—John 1:12-18; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3. Christ is the only *Mediator* between God and man—1 Timothy 2:5-6.)

End Notes:

ⁱ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 5

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, pp. 7-8

ⁱⁱⁱ NIDOT, 2:527

^{iv} Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 180

^v *Ibid.*, p. 181

^{vi} John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 7-8

^{vii} *Ibid*, p. 50-52

^{viii} Michael Kruger, *TMS Journal*, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” 12:1, pp.76-78

^{ix} *Ibid*, p. 78

^x Greg Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ: the Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, p. 217

^{xi} *Ibid*.

^{xii} *Ibid*.

^{xiii} Bahnsen, “Pragmatism, Prejudice, and Presuppositionalism,” *Foundations*, pp. 287-290

^{xiv} *Ibid*, p. 292