Bible Literacy Quiz: A Test of Scripture Knowledge

This simple Bible literacy quiz examines some of the key doctrines and events of the Bible. It will give you a good feel for your breadth and depth of basic Scriptural knowledge.

This article is also available in Spanish.

It's alarming to us at Probe Ministries to see the drop in biblical literacy among Americans. Growing numbers of people don't know what the Bible says, even the most basic foundational truths and people and facts.

Evangelical pollster George Barna says,

> Over the past 20 years we have seen the nation's theological views slowly become less aligned with the Bible. Americans still revere the Bible and like to think of themselves as Bible-believing people, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Christians have increasingly been adopting spiritual views that come from Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, the eastern religions and other sources.{1}

That's because we're not reading and studying the Bible. If we don't know what God says is truth, it makes us vulnerable to believing a lie.

Take the Bible Literacy Quiz yourself: click here for a format with the questions and answers separated.



1. Who wrote the first four books of the New Testament?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

2. Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament?

Most conservative scholars hold that the Pentateuch was written by Moses.

3. What two Old Testament books are named for women?

Esther and Ruth.

4. What are the Ten Commandments?

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife—or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:2-17)

5. What is the Greatest Commandment?

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37,38)

6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?

"Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

7. What is the Golden Rule?

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

(Matthew 7:12)

8. What is the Great Commission?

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20)

9. What was the test of a prophet, to know that he was truly from God?

He had to be 100% accurate in his prophecies. The penalty for a false prophet was death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?

Moses. (Exodus 20)

11. Which two people did not die?

Genesis 5:24 says that Enoch, who was Noah's great-grandfather, "walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." The other was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire. (2 Kings 2:11)

12. What is the root of all kinds of evil?

The love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10)

13. What is the beginning of wisdom?

The fear of the Lord. (Psalm 111:10)

14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7)

15. How did sickness and death enter the world?

Romans 5:12 says that sin entered the world though one man, and death through sin. The fall of man is recorded in Genesis 3, where God's perfect creation was spoiled by Adam's sin.

16. Who was the Roman governor who sentenced Christ to death?

Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26)

17. Who are the major prophets?

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

18. What people group is the Old Testament about?

The Hebrews, who became the nation of Israel. They were descendants of Abraham though Isaac.

19. What happened while the Lord Jesus was in the desert for 40 days?

He was tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

20. How many people were on Noah's ark?

Eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. (Genesis 7:13, 1 Peter 2:5)

21. Who was the first murderer?

Cain, who killed his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:8)

22. Which person was afflicted with terrible trials but trusted God through it all?

Job. (See book of Job)

23. Who was Israel's most well-known and well-loved king?

David. (1 Chronicles 29:28)

24. Who was “the weeping prophet?”

Jeremiah.

25. Who was thrown into the lion’s den?

Daniel. (Daniel 6)

26. Who were the two people in the famous fight with a stone and a sling?

David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17)

27. What is the book of Acts about?

The early years of the church, as the gospel begins to spread throughout the world.

28. What are epistles?

Letters.

29. On what occasion was the Holy Spirit given to the church?

Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

30. Whom did God command to sacrifice his only son?

Abraham. (Genesis 22:2)

31. What was the Old Testament feast that celebrated God’s saving the firstborn of Israel the night they left Egypt?

Passover. (Exodus 12:27)

32. Who was the Hebrew who became prime minister of Egypt?

Joseph. (Genesis 41:41)

33. Who was the Hebrew woman who became Queen of Persia?

Esther. (Esther 2:17)

34. Who was the pagan woman who became David's great-grandmother?

Ruth. (Ruth 4:17)

35. Which angel appeared to Mary?

Gabriel. (Luke 1:26)

36. How did the Lord Jesus die?

He gave up His life while being crucified. (John 19:18)

37. What happened to Him three days after He died?

He was raised from the dead. (John 20)

38. What happened to the Lord Jesus 40 days after His resurrection?

He ascended bodily into heaven. (Acts 1:9-11)

39. What should we do when we sin, in order to restore our fellowship with God?

1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

40. How did the universe and world get here?

Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We are told further in Colossians 1:16 and 17 that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who did the creating.

41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?

Satan was originally the best and the brightest angel, but he sinned in his pride, wanting to be God. Some of the angels followed him, and these "fallen angels" were cast out of heaven. (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28)

42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?

The Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21)

43. Where was the Lord Jesus before He was conceived in Mary?

In heaven. (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:49)

44. Who taught in parables?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3)

45. What are parables?

A short, simple story with a spiritual point.

46. Which two animals talked with human speech?

The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3) and Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22:28).

47. With which woman did David commit adultery?

Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11)

48. Which one of their sons succeeded David as king?

Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24)

49. Who was the female judge of Israel?

Deborah. (Judges 4:4)

50. Who was the wisest man in the world?

Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12)

51. Who was the first man?

Adam. (Genesis 2:20)

52. Who was the most humble man on earth?

Moses. (Numbers 12:3)

53. Who was the strongest man on earth?

Samson. (Judges 13-16)

54. Where were the two nations of God’s people taken into captivity?

Israel was taken into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23), and Judah into Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20).

55. Which cupbearer to a foreign king rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem?

Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5)

56. Who were the two Old Testament prophets who worked miracles?

Elijah and Elisha. (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 6)

57. Which Old Testament prophet spent three days in the belly of a great fish?

Jonah. (Jonah 1:17)

58. What is the last book of the Old Testament?

Malachi.

59. For which Israelite commander did the sun stand still?

Joshua. (Joshua 10)

60. Who was the first king of Israel?

Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1)

61. Who built the temple in Israel?

Solomon. (1 Kings 6)

62. Which of the twelve tribes of Israel served as priests?

Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8)

63. Which city fell after the Israelites marched around it daily for seven days?

Jericho. (Joshua 6:20)

64. What did God give the Israelites to eat in the wilderness?

Manna and quail. (Exodus 16)

65. Which two people walked on water?

Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29)

66. Who was the first martyr?

Stephen. (Acts 7)

67. Who betrayed Jesus to the priests, and for how much?

Judas betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. (Matthew 26:14-15)

68. What is the Lord’s Prayer?

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)

69. Who was the first person to see the risen Lord?

Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16)

70. Which prophet and cousin of the Lord was beheaded?

John the Baptist. (John 14:10)

71. To what country did the young Jesus and His parents escape when Herod was threatening His life?

Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15)

72. What was Christ's first miracle?

He turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:11)

73. Which one of the Lord's personal friends did He raise from the dead?

Lazarus. (John 11)

74. Who was the greatest missionary of the New Testament?

Paul. (see book of Acts)

75. Who was Paul's first partner?

Barnabas. (Acts 13:2)

76. Whom did an angel release from prison?

Peter. (Acts 12)

77. Which event caused God to splinter human language into many tongues?

The building of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11)

78. Which chapter of an Old Testament prophet's book gives a detailed prophecy of the Messiah's death by crucifixion?

Isaiah 53.

79. Who wrestled all night with the Lord and was left with a permanent limp?

Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32)

80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?

Timothy and Titus.

81. Who was hailed as a god when he was bitten by a snake but nothing bad happened?

Paul. (Acts 28:5-6)

82. Which two New Testament writers were brothers of the Lord Jesus?

James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55)

83. Which two New Testament books were written by a doctor?

Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11)

84. Who had a coat of many colors?

Joseph. (Genesis 37:3)

85. In what sin did Aaron lead the Israelites while his brother Moses was up on the mountain talking to God?

They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. (Exodus 32)

86. How many books are there in the entire Bible?

66: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament.

87. What's the difference between John the Baptist and the John who wrote several New Testament books?

John the Baptist was a prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God was near in preparation for his cousin Jesus' ministry. The John who wrote the gospel of John, the epistles—1, 2 and 3 John—and Revelation, was one of the twelve apostles and one of those closest to the Lord, along with Peter and James. He called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

88. Who saw the Lord appear to him in a burning bush?

Moses. (Exodus 3)

89. How many sons did Jacob have?

Twelve. They were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22)

90. Who gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew?

Esau. (Genesis 25:33)

91. Which Psalm starts out, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?”

Psalm 23.

92. Who disowned the Lord Jesus three times before a cock crowed?

Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75)

93. What did the Lord do just after the Last Supper to demonstrate His love and humility?

He washed the disciples’ feet. (John 13:5)

94. Where is the New Testament “Hall of Faith?”

Hebrews 11.

95. Who appeared with the Lord Jesus in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration?

Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4)

96. Who is the second Adam?

The Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49)

97. Which Old Testament prophet married a prostitute because God told him to?

Hosea. (Hosea 1:2)

98. What are the two sacred ordinances that the Lord commanded

us to observe?

Baptism (Matthew 28:19,20) and Communion, or the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?

Spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-13, 1 Peter 4:10-11)

100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?

Joseph of Arimathea. (Matthew 27:57-60)

101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?

Nobody knows.

102. Which is the "epistle of joy?"

Philippians.

103. What is the book of Revelation about?

The end of the world.

104. Who is the bride of Christ?

The church—that is, all who have trusted Him for salvation. (Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-8)

Note

1. bit.ly/fR8BuA

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Truth: What It Is and Why We Can Know It

Rick Wade explores truth from a biblical and philosophical perspective. Despite what many believe, it IS possible to know truth because of the role of Jesus Christ as creator and revealer of truth.

The Loss of Confidence



Did you see the movie *City of Angels?* Nicholas Cage plays an angel named Seth who has taken a special interest in a surgeon named Maggie, played by Meg Ryan. Maggie's lost a patient on the operating table, and she is very upset about it. Seth meets her in a hallway in the hospital, and gets her to talk about the loss. Here is a snippet of the conversation:

Maggie: I lost a patient.

Seth: You did everything you could.

Maggie: I was holding his heart in my hand when he died.

Seth: He wasn't alone.

Maggie: Yes, he was.

Seth: People die.

Maggie: Not on my table.

Seth: People die when their bodies give out.

Maggie: It's my job to keep their bodies from giving out. Or

what am I doing here?

Seth: It wasn't your fault, Maggie.

Maggie: I wanted him to live.

Seth: He *is* living. Just not the way you think.

Maggie: I don't believe in that.

Seth: Some things are true whether you believe in 'em or not.{1}

What did he say?! "Some things are true whether you believe in 'em or not"?? Are you kidding?!? That's crazy talk these days! I have a right to my own opinion, and if I don't believe it, if it's not my opinion, it's not true . . . for me, anyway.

The meaning of *truth* has changed in recent decades. Whereas once it meant statements about reality, today it often means what works or what is meaningful to me. This kind of language is heard primarily in the context of religion and morality. We have lost confidence in our ability to know what reality *is*. So much emphasis has been put on knowledge through sense experience that anything outside the boundaries of the senses is considered unknowable. Moral and religious discussions frequently end with, "Well, that's *your* opinion," or the more colorful, "Opinions are like belly buttons. Everyone has one." It's assumed that opinions can't be universally, objectively true or false. Each person is his or her own authority over what is true. Truth is a personal possession which is why people get so offended when challenged. A challenge is taken personally. "This is *my* truth. Don't touch it!" Strong challenges are even taken as a sign of disrespect.

What does it mean when truth is lost? In philosophy, the result is skepticism or pragmatism. In society in general, one sees a degeneration from skepticism to hypocrisy to cynicism. First we say no one can know what is true—that's skepticism.

Then someone says "I have the truth" but then speaks or acts in a way not in keeping with that "truth" (if truth is uncertain, it can change with my moods)—that's hypocrisy. Then we stop trusting each other—that's cynicism. In politics, power and image are what count. In matters of morality, there is no standard above us; social consensus is the best we can hope for, or "human solidarity," according to Christopher Hitchens. Justice has no sure footing. Might becomes right.

Elsewhere I have written that we don't have to give in either to the demand for absolute certainty or to the skepticism of our day.{2} We can be confident in our ability to know truth even though not exhaustively. In this article I want to look at the nature and ground of truth, for these are of utmost importance in regard to the question of reliable knowledge.

Truth: The Significance of Its Loss

Let's look more closely at what it means to lose confidence in knowing truth. One problem is that we become closed up in our individual shells with each of us having his or her own truth. Theologian Roger Nicole notes that the loss of truth means the loss of meaning in language; if we don't know whether a proposition means what it seems to mean or its opposite, then language is impotent to convey reliable knowledge. And we get caught up in contradictions. As Nicole wrote, those who deny objective validity "presuppose such validity at least for their denial!"{3}

Problems are also created in the realm of morality. Historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto wrote this:

> *The retreat from truth is one of the great dramatic, untold stories of history. . . . For professional academics in the affected disciplines, to have grown indifferent to truth is an extraordinary reversal of traditional obligations; it is like physicians renouncing the obligation to sustain life or theologians losing interest in God—developments, formerly*

> *unthinkable, which now loom as truth diminishes. The trashing of truth began as an academic vice, but the debris is now scattered all over society. It is spread through classroom programmes, . . . In a society of concessions to rival viewpoints, in which citizens hesitate to demand what is true and denounce what is false, it becomes impossible to defend the traditional moral distinction between right and wrong, which are relativized in turn. Unless it is true, what status is left for a statement like 'X is wrong' where X is, say, adultery, infanticide, euthanasia, drug-dealing, Nazism, paedophilia, sadism or any other wickedness due, in today's climate, for relativization into the ranks of the acceptable? It becomes, like everything else in western society today, a matter of opinion; and we are left with no moral basis for encoding some opinions rather than others, except the tyranny of the majority.{4}*

One of the worst problems for a well-ordered society is cynicism. First we say there's no truth. But then we hypocritically push our views on others as though *we* have the truth. Then people stop trusting each other. "You say there are no fixed truths, but then you push your claims on me." The result is cynicism.

Some people claim that truth claims are suspect because the words we use are changeable; they can't carry fixed, eternal truths. If we don't think it's possible that words convey truth, then words lose their objective meaning, and we start giving them our *own* meanings.

The loss of confidence in knowing truth is significant for Christians, too, who, without realizing it, adopt similar patterns of thought. When such confidence in knowing truth is weakened, one cannot have confidence that the Bible is the true Word of God. Its authority in the individual's life is weakened because what it says becomes questionable. Evangelism becomes a matter of sharing one's own religious preferences,

rather than delivering God's authoritative Word. Bible study becomes a sharing of opinions with none being normative. Each has his or her own opinion and no one is supposed to say a given opinion is wrong.

Truth in Scripture

What is this "truth" thing we talk so much about? My dictionary has such definitions as genuineness, reality, correctness, and statements which accord with reality.{5} Truth can also be a characteristic of persons and things. Someone or some thing that is true is genuine or in keeping with his or its nature. And truth can refer to quality of conduct. The Bible speaks of people doing the truth rather than doing evil (cf. Nah. 9:33; Jn. 3:20, 21).{6}

To help in considering all these matters, let's look at truth as understood in Scripture, and then at truth considered in philosophical terms.

What does the Bible teach about truth?

In the Old Testament, the word most often translated *true, truth,* or *truly* is *'emet* or a cognate.{7} This word is also translated "faithfulness." Let's consider the matter of faithfulness first.

For the Israelites, Yahweh was "the God in whose word and work one could place complete confidence."{8} For example, God said through Zechariah: "I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God" (8:8). Nehemiah said to God: "You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (9:33). "The works of his hand are faithful and just," said the Psalmist; "all his precepts are trustworthy" (111:7).

'Emet also means truth as over against falsehood as when Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were telling the truth (Gen. 42:16), and when the Israelites were warned to

test accusations that people were worshiping other gods to see if they were true (Deut. 13:14). Commenting on Ps. 43:3–"Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me"–theologian Anthony Thiselton says that "Truth enables [the writer] to escape from the dark, and to see things for what they are."{9}

We shouldn't conclude by these two uses of the word that on any given occasion "truth" always means *both* faithfulness *and* the opposite of falsehood. However, there is a connection between the two. Theologian Anthony Thiselton says the connection depends "on the fact that when God or man is said to act faithfully, often this means that his word and his deed are one. He has acted faithfully in accordance with his spoken word. Hence the believer may lean his whole weight confidently on God, and find him faithful."{10}

Thus, in the Old Testament, truth is a matter of both words and deeds. "Men express their respect for truth not in abstract theory, but in their daily witness to their neighbour and their verbal and commercial transactions," Thiselton says.{11}

In the New Testament, there is an increased focus on truth as conformity to reality and as opposed to falsehood. The Greek word *alētheia* means, literally, "not hidden." When Peter was sprung from prison by an angel, he didn't know if it was real (or true) or a dream (Acts 12:9). John the Baptist bore witness to the truth (Jn. 5:33). Jesus used the phrase "I tell you in truth" four times to emphasize the correctness of what he was about to say (Lk. 4:25; 9:27; 12:44; 21:3). When Jesus said "I *am* the truth," (Jn. 14:6), He was identifying Himself with what is ultimately and finally real.

Truth in the New Testament isn't disconnected from how we live, however. We are to walk in the truth (2 Jn. 4; 2 Pet. 2:22), and we are to obey the truth (Gal. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:22).

One mustn't oversimplify scriptural teaching on truth.

However, it's safe to say that truth in the Bible means having the correct understanding of the way things really are, and living in accordance with this understanding.

Truth Considered Philosophically

Let's look at truth now from a philosophical perspective, first as what is real, and then as true statements. This is important, because these are the terms according to which non-Christians think about the matter.

First, truth is a characteristic of reality. In short, if something is real, it is true. Or put philosophically, if something "participates in being," it is true. When we say that the God of the Bible is the true God, we mean He really exists and really is God!

By analogy, we might ask if a plant we see in a room is a true or real plant. We want to know if it is organic, and not plastic or fabric. If we say a *person* has exhibited true love, we're saying the person's actions weren't motivated by anything other than concern for the object of the person's love.

Second, truth is a characteristic of accurate statements or propositions. Sentences which express true meanings convey truth. This is what we typically think of when we speak of truth.{12}

We often divide truth in this sense into the categories of *objective* and *subjective*. When we speak of objective truth, we mean that a statement truly reflects what is real, or really the case, apart from ourselves as knowers. And whether we believe it or not. Such truth is public; others can verify it. When we speak of *subjective* truth, we're speaking of truth that comes from us individually, where we ourselves are the only authority. For example, "My leg hurts" is subjective in the sense that I am the sole authority. Or if I claim that

“French vanilla ice cream is the best tasting kind there is,” that is a subjective truth claim.”

Both truth as what’s real and truth as objectively true statements are in crisis today. First, postmodernists say we can’t know what’s ultimately real. In academia this means there is no framework for integrating the various areas of study. In everyday life it results in fractured lives as we find ourselves having to conform to different situations without any integrating structure. French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard had this to say about postmodernism: “[Postmodernism] has deconstructed its entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces—that is postmodern.”{13}

We can rearrange the pieces in a number of different ways, but there is, as it were, no picture on the front of the puzzle box to guide us.{14} Such a view of truth leaves one unwilling, or unable really, to say what is true about anything of importance, and, as a result, forces one into the rather mindless tolerance demanded today. Dorothy Sayers had this to say about such “tolerance”:

> *In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.{15}*

Second, although truth as true statements is still acknowledged today, some important matters are considered subjective which should be acknowledged as objective, such as statements about God and morality. Christians believe we can know what is ultimately and objectively real and true because

the One who *is* ultimately real and true, God, has revealed Himself to us.

A Foundation for Knowledge of Truth

Now we finally get to the key idea of this article.

Christians claim that they have the truth, a claim that is met with scorn. We are tempted to point to the Bible as our basis for the claim, but critics claim that we're jumping the gun. If no one can have confidence in knowing truth, then what good is the Bible? It isn't the *source* that's the question; not yet anyway. It's the very *possibility* of knowing truth that is questioned. How are truth and the possibility of knowing it even possible?

In a nutshell, we have what philosophical naturalism has given up: we have a metaphysical basis for knowing truth, a basis in what is.

You see, for the naturalist, there is nothing fixed behind the changing world. Three things need to be the case about the world for us to know truth: that it is real; that it is rational; and that there is something fixed behind it. *And* we need to be able to connect with what is around us with our senses and our reason.

Here's the key point: *Knowledge of truth is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the* Logos *of God, Jesus Christ.* I'll return to this below.

It is not enough that Christians to simply throw their hands up in despair over this. We have a message that is true for all people. But it may not do to just point to the Bible as our source for true beliefs if the very possibility of knowing any enduring truth is in doubt. Upon what basis can we believe we can really know truth?

To have true knowledge of the world outside our own minds, there has to be a solid connection between our thoughts and the world. The world has to be rational, and we have to have the proper sensory and mental apparatus necessary to comprehend it. Christianity provides such a connection between our minds and reality outside us in the person of the *Logos* of God.

"In the beginning was the Word," John wrote, the *Logos* (John 1:1; cf. Rev. 19:13). In Greek philosophy, *logos* was the impersonal principle of cosmic reason which was thought to give order and intelligibility to the world. John's *Logos*, however, is not impersonal; a Person, not a principle. The *Logos*—Jesus of Nazareth—is the intelligent expression of God or the Word of God (Jn. 1:1,14; Rev. 19:13). He is not secondary to God, but is God.

The significance of this for the possibility of knowing truth is this: knowledge is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the Logos. Remember that Jesus, the *Logos*, is not only the One who reveals God to us, but is also the creator of the universe (Jn.1:3; Col.1:16,17; Heb.1:2). Because the universe came from a rational Being, the universe is rational. Further, there is no hint in Scripture that the world is an illusion; it is just what it appears to be: real. And because we're made in God's image, we're rational beings who can know the universe.{16} Also, we can perceive the world around us because we were created with the sensory apparatus to perceive it.

But this is just knowledge of our world. What about knowledge of God? Not only has the *Logos* created us with the ability to know the world, He has also revealed Himself in a rational and even observable way. He is, as Carl Henry put it, "the God Who speaks and shows."{17}

Because of all this, it is not arrogance that is behind the Christian claim that truth can be known. We claim it because

we have a basis for it: Jesus of Nazareth, the *Logos* of God, the Creator, has made knowledge of truth possible, knowledge of this world *and* of God. Modern philosophy and theology denied God's ability to reveal Himself to us in any significant way. But such ideas diminish God Himself. He made us to know His world. He gave us sense organs to know the empirical world; He gave us rational minds to engage in logical and mathematical reasoning and to engage in the many, many deductions we make every day of our lives. He also made us to know Him, and He revealed Himself to us through a variety of ways.

It's no wonder that the naturalistic philosophy of our time is incapable of having confidence in knowing truth. It has lost a metaphysical ground for truth. Jesus of Nazareth is not only our source of salvation; He is also the Creator. And because of this, we can have confidence in our ability to know truth in general and truth about God in particular.

Notes

1. *City of Angels*, DVD, directed by Brad Silberling (Warner Home Video, 1998).

2. Rick Wade, "Confident Belief," Probe Ministries, 2001, www.probe.org/confident-belief/.

3. Roger Nicole, "The Biblical Concept of Truth," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 287.

4. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 165-66.

5. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed, s.v., "true."

6. John V. Dahms, "The Nature of Truth," *JETS* 28/4 (December. 1985), 455-465. This is parallel to Carnell's triad of

ontological truth, propositional truth, and truth as personal rectitude. See Edward John Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), 14-17.

7. Nicole, 288. I am indebted to Nicole's and Thiselton's (cf. note 8 below) studies for much of what follows.

8. Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); s.v. "Truth" by A. C. Thiselton, III.877, quoting Alfred Jepsen, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, I:313.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 5, *God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 336.

13. Jean Baudrillard, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: 2000), 169.

14. See Groothuis, 170.

15. Dorothy Sayers, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 4; quoted in Groothuis, 170.

16. As Henry says, "As creative, the Word of God is the ground of all existence; as revelatory, it is the ground of all human knowledge." (GRA, 5:334) Also, "The Logos is the creative Word whereby God fashioned and preserves the universe. He is the light of the understanding, the Reason that enables intelligible creatures to comprehend the truth." (GRA 3:212).

17. The subtitle to Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol.

1.

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“Is It Fair That People Born Into a Christian Home Become Christians and Everybody Else is Doomed to Hell?”

Hey I just read your article on God judging people for sins they didn’t know were wrong. It was very good and helped me a lot but I still have a question. My brother is an atheist and we have been having some friendly debates on God and such. And the point he always makes that I cannot get over is when he says that I am a Christian because I was raised in a Christian home (as was he, but he says he fell away when he looked at the facts himself instead of believing just what he was told) so I am Christian. If I was raised in a Muslim home then I would be Muslim. And the same goes for any other religion. He has a good point. If I was raised in an Islamic family I would believe that Allah was the true God. Why was I so lucky to be born into the one right religion? So what is a good counter argument? I would really appreciate your help.

Also, he makes the point that, let’s say a kid in North Korea who has passed the age of accountability dies. Does he go to heaven? If so then that means God is letting a non-believer into heaven, right? If he doesn’t and goes to Hell, then that seems a little unjust to let a kid who never heard of him go to Hell. Now I know Romans 1:18-32 says that everyone hears of God and I completely believe that and every other word of the

Bible, but how can some kid in North Korea or any other given place have nearly as good of a chance as me to get into heaven? I would love any help that you can give me.

Thanks for your letter. These are very good questions. First, let me recommend a very good article by an excellent Christian philosopher that addresses some of your questions. It's entitled, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ": www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5220. Another helpful piece is this, called "Politically Incorrect Salvation": www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5223.

These articles, which you should probably read at least twice, will help you think through many of these issues at a very sophisticated level.

Here is my own brief response to your questions. This response is not intended to be exhaustive; I've referred you to the articles for a more thorough response.

First, I think that you are quite right that passages such as Romans 1:18-23 clearly teach that God has made His existence evident to all men (we can except, of course, very young children and the severely retarded, etc. Please see an article by Probe's Founder, Jimmy Williams, answering the question if babies go to hell). Since all men are the recipients of God's revelation in nature and conscience, they are morally responsible and accountable to Him for how they respond to this revelation. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these people reject God's revelation and they have no one but themselves to blame for this. It's very important that we always bear this in mind. God has made His existence evident to all men, but the vast majority simply reject this evidence—and for this, each is personally accountable to God.

Now, although God is very gracious, and will often send more

revelation even to those who reject the revelation they've already been given, He is under no obligation to do so. If people reject the revelation which God has given, He is not in any way obligated to give them more. They are responsible for what He has given, and what He has already given is more than sufficient for them to know that God exists and that they are morally accountable to Him.

But what if someone in an Islamic country or North Korea were to respond positively to God's revelation in creation and conscience? In that case, I think that we can safely say (on the basis of such passages as Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10) that anyone who responds positively to God's general revelation, will be given yet more revelation (just as the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius the centurion were—both of whom became Christians, by the way!).

In other words, God has provided everyone with enough revelation to respond to Him in a positive way. For those who do, God will provide yet more revelation (including the gospel of Jesus Christ). But for those who do not, He is under no obligation to provide yet more light to those who reject what He's already given.

For a much more thorough explanation, please refer to the articles I mentioned. You can find more by William Lane Craig here: www.reasonablefaith.org

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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In Defense of History

Don Closson critiques the postmodern notion that we have limited or no access to history, except through biased lenses. He vies for a humble, but confident view of history as a scholarly pursuit, while writing in defense of history as a bedrock of Christian truth claims.

A convenient claim of our postmodern times is that historical truth does not exist, or, at the very least, is not accessible to us. It is fashionable to believe that all historical writing is fiction in the sense that it is one person's subjective opinion. History as an enterprise is more like the creation of literature, say some, than a scientific investigation. Because we cannot be certain about the events of history, all perspectives must be treated as equally valid. One historian has written, "The Postmodern view that language could not relate to anything but itself must . . . entail the dissolution of history . . . and necessarily jeopardizes historical study as normally understood."{1}



If history is something that we create rather than uncover via the rules of scientific historical research, why do history at all? The postmodern response is that all history is politically motivated. French philosopher Michel Foucault became famous for insisting that power creates knowledge rather than the traditional assumption that knowledge is power. He wrote that since there is no access to value-free historical information, the need to write about history must come from the desire to control the past for political purposes. In effect, all historical writing is a form of propaganda.

This popular way of viewing history has dramatic implications for Christians who share their faith. One of the first objections that a Christian is likely to encounter when

sharing the Gospel is the denial of any confident access to what has happened in the past. Since Christianity is a faith that is tied to history, this creates an immediate impasse. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ has not been raised from the dead in a real historical sense, then our preaching is useless, our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all men. Christian evangelists and apologists often point to the existence of archeological remains, ancient manuscripts, and written accounts of historical events in arguing that Christianity is a reasonable faith and that the Bible is a trustworthy and accurate account of the life of Christ. The Judeo/Christian tradition stands on the belief that God acts in history and that history reflects this divine incursion.

The Argument Against History

Until recently, students of history had two competing approaches to their craft to consider. One approach, represented by Sir Geoffrey Elton, argued that historians should focus on the documentary record left by the past in order to find the objective truth about what actually happened. These pieces of data are then used to construct a narrative of political events which, in turn, becomes the core of any serious historical writing. Put another way, it's the facts that count, and the facts should be used to understand the actions and motivations of political leaders who determine the paths taken by nations or kingdoms. All of this assumes our ability to discover objective truth about history.

The other approach represented by E. H. Carr and his book *What is History?* argues that history books and the people who write them are products of a given time and place. Therefore, history is seen and written through the lens of the historians' prejudices. This is often called the *sociological view of history* where a study of the historian is just as important as the comprehension of his writings.

Over the last three or four decades, Elton's emphasis on facts has been slowly losing ground. As one writer put it, "Few historians would now defend the hard-line concept of historical objectivity espoused by Elton."{2} Even worse, Carr's sociological view is being replaced by one that is even further removed from seeing history as objective truth. The arrival of postmodern theory in the 1980s eradicated the search for historical truth and diminished the voice of professional historians to be just one discourse among many.

Historian David Harlan commented that by the end of the 1980s most historians—even most working historians—had all but given up on the possibility of acquiring reliable, objective knowledge about the past.{3} By the mid-1990s some historians were saying that "History has been shaken right down to its scientific and cultural foundations."{4} An Australian academic went so far as to declare the killing of history.{5}

The denial of objective historical knowledge is impacting our culture and the church. Individuals involved with a movement called the Emergent Church generally agree with postmodernity's denial of our ability to know objective historical truth. They also claim that those who believe they can be certain about the past are dangerous. But it is the culture at large, and especially the unsaved that makes this issue so important.

A Double Standard

A close look at this issue reveals a growing tendency to utilize a double standard when it comes to determining what happened in the past.

It seems that the only historical record that Western culture is certain of is that the Nazis committed mass genocide against six million European Jews. The rest of history is relegated to the uncertainties of our postmodern suspicions.

This loss of confidence has become so extreme that some nations, especially in Europe, have resorted to the force of law to regulate what can and what cannot be said regarding some historical events.

Let’s look at one example. France has made it a crime to deny the Holocaust and has successfully prosecuted a number of authors who have questioned the particulars of the event. Once a nation goes down this path of legislated historical truth, it’s difficult to turn back. French lawmakers recently attempted to legislate away denials of the Armenian genocide in 1915 by the Turkish Ottomans. The problem with these actions is not the historical accuracy of the position taken by the French government (the historical evidence supports the French view), but rather that history is being decided by legislative acts rather than by a consensus of historians who hold academic standards in high regard.

The temptation to legislate historical truth lures the other side to legislate its own version. Turkey has now prosecuted authors for admitting the possibility that the Armenian holocaust actually happened in 1915. It was decided that such a view was un-Turkish.

If objective historical truth cannot be discerned, it doesn’t make much sense to legislate one version of it. This Orwellian response to a loss of academic confidence only creates mistrust and a greater opportunity for the abuse or propagandistic use of history.

How should Christians respond to this battle over the past?

History is important to the Christian faith. We need to encourage high standards of academic scholarship, even when the outcome doesn’t immediately support our biblical views. We also need to humbly concede that the process will be inexact, and that absolute certainty regarding any single event will always escape our grasp. Our goal should be to find a middle

position between absolute certainty about what happened and the complete despair that some postmodernists advocate.

Converging Lines of Evidence

Can we really know anything about history? Thus far we have considered some of the arguments against what is called objective historical knowledge or historical certainty. Let's look now at three ways of thinking about doing history that might help restore confidence in the process.

The first method is called the *converging lines of evidence* approach. How would this technique apply to the subject of the Holocaust? The first sources of evidence would include written documents and photographs from the period, including personal letters, official papers, and business forms. German administrators were highly efficient record keepers, thus making significant amounts of data available. Another source of evidence would be eyewitness accounts from survivors. These have been carefully collected and recorded over the years. Evidence from the physical remains of the concentration camps themselves and inferential evidence from comparing European population counts before and after the war provide more resources. None of this information is taken at face value, and no one line of evidence is conclusive. But as the evidence accumulates our confidence in understanding the event rises with it.

The second model for acquiring historical knowledge is called the *hermeneutical spiral*. This method argues that every time we ask a question regarding a topic, the research gives us answers that bring us a little closer to understanding the event. It also gives us new questions to research. Each pass we make at understanding brings us a little closer to the event itself. If applied to understanding Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, one might begin by reading the letter in English and attempting to understand its purpose or message.

This would raise questions about Paul's audience, prompting research into the culture of the first century. Eventually one might learn biblical Greek to better understand exactly what Paul was trying to communicate. As D. A. Carson writes, "I hold that it is possible and reasonable to speak of finite human beings knowing some things truly, even if nothing exhaustively or omnisciently."{6}

The third approach is known as the *fusion of horizons* model. Just as no two people have an identical view of the horizon, no two people will have an identical perspective on a historical event. They will interpret the event differently because of their cultural backgrounds. To overcome this, the learner must try to step out of his or her current cultural setting, with its beliefs and presuppositions, and then become immersed in the language, ideas, and beliefs of the past, attempting to step into the shoes of those participating in the event itself.

History and Christianity

Bernard Lewis, perhaps America's foremost scholar on the Middle East, writes that great efforts have been made, and continue to be made, to falsify the record of the past and to make history a tool of propaganda.{7} How does this falsifying of history impact Christians and the church?

First, the Christian faith stands on a historical foundation. Unlike other religious systems, a real person, not just teachings or a life example, is at the center of Christianity. Jesus provided a once-for-all payment for sin, and it is our faith in that provision that makes salvation possible. Christians also believe that God has revealed himself through the inspired writings of the Old and New Testaments. Since their influence depends on both their antiquity and authenticity, archeological remains and ancient manuscripts are vital for making a defense for the authority of the Bible.

Second, historical knowledge is important when we answer critics of the Christian faith. A current example is the comparison of Islam and Christianity regarding tolerance and civil rights. The myth of Islamic tolerance was created in the seventeenth century when French Protestants used Islam to shame the Catholic Church.{8} Unfortunately, they had little or no firsthand experience with the brutality of Islam towards those under its rule. This tolerance myth has been utilized in recent decades by Muslim writers in the West to continue the misinformation. Only recently have scholars begun to speak out and refute the tolerance myth and uncover the brutality of worldwide jihad over the centuries. It is ironic that as this program is being written, the president of Iran has convened a conference to promote the idea that the Jewish Holocaust is a myth created by the west to impose a homeland for the Jews in the Middle East.

Whether it's the Crusades, the Inquisition, or the slave trade in the west, we need to be able to trust the consensus of historians who are committed to high academic standards to get an accurate picture of what actually happened so that we can give a wise response to our critics. In some cases, we may need to apologize for those who acted in the name of Christ yet whose actions violated the teaching of Scripture. In other cases, we may have to gently correct misconceptions about an historical event in the media or in our schools that are the result of inaccurate or incomplete information.

If we give up on the possibility of acquiring historical knowledge, we also give up an important tool for showing that our faith is reasonable.

Notes

1. Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 3.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. Ibid., 4

4. Ibid., 3
5. Ibid., 4.
6. D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Zondervan, 2006), 116.
7. Serge Trifkovic, *Defeating Jihad* (Regina Orthodox Press, 2006), 265.
8. Robert Spencer, ed., *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2005), 17.

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"We Only Learn from What We Experience in Life—Stop Judging!"

How can you be so sure of what you write? We only learn from what we experience in life. Expand your horizons, stop judging and embrace life. Peace.

Dear friend,

How do you know that experience is the only source of knowledge? I would suggest that that is an unnecessarily narrow understanding of how we gain knowledge. I would also suggest that you do not live by this belief. Since you appear to be a student from your e-mail address, let me ask: Have you passed any history classes? You didn't *experience* the subjects of the classes; you learned about them a different way. Did you ever see someone do something unwise or dumb and choose not to do it? You learned without experiencing.

We suggest that there are four primary ways we learn things:

1. Experience: living through it (for example, getting burned by putting a hand on a stovetop or in a flame)

2. Reasoning: figuring things out (for example, logic—2 premises and a conclusion. "My husband earned his doctorate. Ph.D.s are earned in graduate school. Therefore, Ray went through graduate school.")

3. Observation: watching (things always fall down, not up)

4. Revelation: being told from an outside source. Some things we can't know without being told. (for example, what God tells us in the Bible and through the person of Jesus Christ)

The reason you (correctly) discern confidence in our writing is that our faith is based on strong evidence, and because we understand that there are other ways of knowing than experience.

If you truly are curious—as opposed to simply venting some steam—we have a couple of articles you may find interesting:

- *"Confident Belief by Rick Wade*
- *"How I Know Christianity Is True by Pat Zukeran*

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

The Christian Mind

The Need for a Christian Mind

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17)(1) This familiar admonition was first spoken by John the Baptist and soon after it was echoed by Jesus. The phrase is certainly worthy of a great deal of attention; it provides a lot of food for thought. For the moment, though, let's concentrate on the first word: *Repent*. This expression is a central portion of the doctrines concerning sin and salvation. Literally it refers to a *change of mind*. It does not mean that one is to be sorry for some action. Thus, the first hearers were admonished to realize that they were in need of radical change before a holy God, beginning with their minds. They were to turn from sin to God by changing their thinking. Certainly the same holds true for us. Most of us are in need of reminders that lead us back to one of the crucial aspects of our salvation: repentance, or a change in our thinking. In addition, we should couple such memories with the realization that our changed minds should always be alive to God. To paraphrase Kepler's famous phrase, we are to "think God's thoughts after Him." Since the Christian life is all-inclusive, the mind is included.

But, some may ask, do we actually have a mind? Current research and thought in the fields of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology concludes that we are much too free with the word *mind*. Perhaps we should get used to making reference to the brain, rather than the mind.
"Some neuroscientists are beginning to suspect that everything

that makes people human is no more than an interaction of chemicals and electricity inside the labyrinthine folds of the brain."(2) E.O. Wilson, the father of what is called sociobiology, proposes that we can determine an ethical system based on scientifically observable evidence. He writes, "The empiricist argument holds that if we explore the biological roots of moral behavior, and explain their material origins and biases, we should be able to fashion a wise and enduring ethical consensus."(3) Thus, ethics are not to be found external to physical reality; there is no mind through which we can respond ethically. It seems that Wilson and those who are like-minded believe "the mind is headed for an ignoble fate. Just as the twinkle of stars was reduced to nuclear explosions, and life itself to biochemical reactions, so the brain may one day be explained by the same forces that run the rest of the universe."(4)

Such perspectives should come as no surprise if we are aware of the permeation of a naturalistic worldview in both the physical and social sciences. The Christian, though, is not relegated to this type of reduction. A biblical worldview makes it clear that we are more than physical beings; we are also non-physical beings made in God's image. As a popular joke from the nineteenth century says:

> *What's the matter?*
> *Never mind.*
> *What is mind?*
> *No matter.(5)*

The truth of the joke should not be lost on those of us who

claim to be followers of Christ. We should realize the importance of cultivating Christian minds. As the great statesman Charles Malik stated, “As Christ is the Light of the World, his light must shine and be brought to bear upon the problem of the formation of the mind.”(6)

The Scriptures and the Mind (Part 1)

“Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD” (Isa. 1:18). Imagine you are in a courtroom. You are the defense attorney; the prosecutor is God Himself. He has just invited you, Judah’s attorney, to engage in debate concerning the case at hand which happens to focus on the crimes of your client. Indeed, He wants the two of you to *reason together*. That is the scenario presented in this famous passage from the first chapter of Isaiah. God was inviting Judah to debate a case in court.(7) What a remarkable idea! And what a stunning statement concerning the importance of the mind. God was calling upon His people to use their minds to see if they could engage Him in debate concerning their sins.

In a time when the mind appears to be denigrated at every hand, such a passage should serve to reawaken us to the importance of using the minds God has given us. After all, the Bible, which most Christians claim to be the very word of God, calls the mind to attention throughout its pages. As J.P. Moreland states, “If we are going to be wise, spiritual people prepared to meet the crises of our age, we must be a studying, learning community that values the life of the mind.”(8) Let’s begin such studying and learning by considering some of what the Bible says about the ungodly and rebellious

mind, and then the godly mind.

First, the ungodly mind is described in terms that are sobering. When we apply these phrases to the culture around us, we can better understand why what we see and hear disturbs us. For example, Romans 1:18-28 describes what one scholar called “The Night.” Here are some of the ways unbelievers’ minds are depicted in this dark passage:

- Suppressing the truth
- Rejecting God
- Foolish speculations
- Foolish hearts
- Professing wisdom
- Exchanging God for a counterfeit
- Lusting hearts
- Exchanging truth for a lie
- Worshipping the creature
- Degrading passions
- Exchanging the natural for the unnatural
- Committing indecent acts
- Depraved minds

Another somber statement about the ungodly way of thinking is found in 2 Corinthians 4:4: “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Perhaps you have had conversations with unbelievers that were characteristic of such “blindness.” The person with whom you were talking just didn’t see it as you attempted to share the truth of Christ. Such responses should not surprise us.

A foolish mind also is described frequently in Scripture. Jeremiah 4:22 is a strong indictment of those who know the things of God, but foolishly reject them:

For My people are foolish,
They know Me not;
They are stupid children,
And they have no understanding.
They are shrewd to do evil,
But to do good they do not know.

Hosea 4:6 shows the result of God's reaction when His people reject the truth:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.

These ancient proclamations could not be more contemporary. May we heed their warnings!

The Scriptures and the Mind (Part 2)

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and
we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). When the apostle
Paul wrote these words, he was very aware of the need for a Christian mind. Philosophical
speculations abounded in his time, just as in our time. Thus he described the Christian's mental
responsibility in terms of warfare. The Christian mind is active—it enters the battle; it is filled with
the knowledge of God—it is prepared for battle; it puts all things under the lordship of Christ—it
follows the only true commander into battle. And that battle has been won innumerable times, even
in the minds of brilliant people. "One of the most astonishing and undeniable arguments for the
truth of [Christianity] . . . is the fact that . . . some of the most subtle of human intellects have been

led to render submission to the Saviour."(9) The Bible contains many such insights into the nature of a Christian mind. We will consider two of these.

Reason is a term that is descriptive of the Christian mind. This does not mean that a Christian is to be a rationalist, but rather he is to use reason based on the reason of God found in Scripture. For example, on one of several occasions Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus to test Him by asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus responded by referring to their ability to discern signs of certain kinds of weather. Then He said, "Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3)? Obviously He was noting how people use reason to arrive at conclusions, but the Christian mind would conclude the things of God. The book of Acts indicates that the apostle Paul used reason consistently to persuade his hearers of the truth of his message. Acts 17:2-3 states that "according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths *reasoned* [emphasis added] with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead." For two years in Ephesus Paul was "reasoning [emphasis added] daily in the school of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9). In light of the fact that our contemporary world attempts to reject reason, such examples should spur us to hold out for the possibility of reasonable dialogue with those around us. After all, those who reject reason must use reason to reject reason.

If the Christian mind is characterized by reason, such reason must be founded upon knowledge from God. Upon reflection of their conversation with Jesus on the

road to Emmaus, two of the disciples said, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24:32)? The word *hearts* in this passage refers to both moral and mental perception. In his letter to the Colossians Paul wrote, “we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). And in his Ephesian letter he wrote, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (Eph. 1:18-19). May this beautiful prayer apply to us as we consider how to use our God-given minds!

Mandates for the Mind

“AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH” (Mark 12:30). These words have echoed for thousands of years, beginning with Moses and leading to Jesus. They contain the first of what I call *Mandates for the Mind*: Strive to Know God. To love someone we must know him or her. In the case of my wife, for instance, it would have been absurd to declare that I loved her before ever meeting her. My love for her implies an intimate knowledge *about* and knowledge *of* her. In the same manner we are to strive both to know *about* God and to *know* Him intimately. Our minds are crucial to this mandate. It is my contention that one of the major problems in contemporary Christianity is that too many of us are attempting know God without using our minds to investigate what He has told us of Himself in Scripture.

The second mandate is that the Christian mind should strive for truth. “Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’” (John 8:31-32). Abiding in His word implies a continual dedication to using the mind to search the Scriptures, the place where His truth is written.

The third mandate pertains to maturity. Romans 12:2 declares: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” It is pertinent to note that the words *conformed*, *transformed*, and *prove* refer to continuous action. Thus, the Christian mind is to be characterized by continuous development toward maturity. Hebrews 5:14 refers to Scripture as “solid food” as the writer describes the mature mind. He then asserts that the Christian is to “press on [continually] to maturity” (Heb. 6:1). Such maturity is a strategic need in the contemporary church.

The fourth mandate involves proclaiming and defending the faith. The maturing Christian mind will actively engage the minds of those around him. For example, Paul modeled this while in Athens: “[H]e was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him” (Acts 17:17-18). Paul proclaimed and defended the truth of the gospel in the synagogue with his own people,

among the populace, and even with the intellectual elite of the time. Such encounters are easily duplicated in our day.

The fifth mandate refers to the need for study. Philippians 4:8 states: “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.” Note the final phrase: “let your mind dwell,” a clause indicative of the need for concentration, or study. The phrase also includes a command that such study is to be continuous. We are to ponder, or think on the things of God.

Applying the Christian Mind

“Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22). This exhortation from the book of James includes the last of our *Mandates for the Mind*. That is, the Christian mind should be applied; what is in the mind should flow to the feet.

It would be easy to state that such a mandate applies to all of life and let that suffice, but specific examples can help us focus on how this works. Thus we will focus on three contrived stories.

Our first story involves a fellow we will call Billy. Billy is an excellent softball player. Three nights per week he plays for his company team. He has a reputation as a fierce competitor who will do virtually anything to win. He also has a volatile temper that explodes in ways that embarrass his family and teammates. On some occasions he even has had shoving and cursing bouts with

opposing players. Each Sunday, and even on other occasions, he attends a well-known church in his city. One Sunday his pastor shared an exceptional sermon based on 1 Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Upon hearing this message, he suddenly realized that softball games could not be isolated from his commitment to Christ. Whether in his business, his family, or his softball games he needed to stop and think: if he is a temple of God, all of life is a sacred task. His life, including softball, was never the same.

The second story focuses on a woman named Sally. She is a teacher in a public elementary school who is also a young Christian. Her new life in Christ has invigorated her to the point that she is beginning to think of ways she can share her joy with her students. She decides that at every opportunity she will encourage the children to discover the wonder of life. As she guides them through science, she expresses awe as they investigate the simplest flower, or the profundity of the solar system. As she discusses arithmetic she encourages them to realize the beauty of logical order in numbers. As she reads stories to them she gently emphasizes the amazing concept of human imagination. In these ways and others Sally begins to realize the excitement of using her mind for God’s glory. In addition, she soon finds that she is having conversations with her students that give her opportunities to share the One who is guiding her.

Our third story concerns Steven, a businessman and father of an eight-year-old boy. Steven has come to the realization that his son, Jimmy, spends most of his time either watching television or

playing computer games. So he begins to consider ways to stimulate Jimmy's thinking. Since he also wants to see Jimmy come to faith in Christ, Steven suggests that they read C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* together. Soon, the two of them are delighting in these tales, and Steven finds ways to discuss the spiritual metaphors in Lewis' classic fantasies.

These stories may not apply directly to your life at this time. But, hopefully they will stimulate a broader understanding of how your mind can be used for God's glory within the routines of life.

Notes

1. All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Version.

2. Sharon Begley, John Carey, and Ray Sawhill, "How the Brain Works," *Newsweek* (7 February 1983), 40.

3. Edward O. Wilson, "The Biological Basis of Morality," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1998), 54.

4. Begley, 47.

5. Quoted in Begley.

6. Charles Habib Malik, "Your Mind Matters; Cultivate It," *Active Christians in Education* (January 1981), 1A.

7. R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 377.

8. J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1997),

39.

9. R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 135.

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