

BIBLICAL BASIS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

African Christian University

Growing
in grace and
knowledge
(2 Peter 3:18)



Table of Contents

Deception of Man	1
Truth of God	2
The Epistemological Task of Christians	2
Be Alert: Pay Careful Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock	3

Deception of Man

Among the angels, the ministering spirits (Heb 1:14), whom God created to serve Him (Psa 103:20-21), was one named Lucifer, or Morning Star, who was anointed to God's special service (Eze 28:14-15). In his beauty and wisdom (Eze 28:12,15) he became proud (Eze 28:17) and exalted himself thinking, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:12-14).

Because God is all-righteous, in perfect holiness (meaning "separate from"), no sin can exist in His presence (Hab 1:12-13), and Lucifer was cast out of heaven with the host of angels that followed his self-exalted example in rebellion against God (Eze 28:16-17; Rev 12:3-9). Lucifer, in his rebellious, fallen state, became "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev 12:9). This is the origination of the "murderer" and "father of lies" (Jhn 8:44) who "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8), deceptively leading all of God's creation in rebellion against Him, "for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14).

Through Jesus Christ, God created everything that exists in six days (Gen 1:1-2:3, Exo 20:11, Jhn 1:1-3), culminating on the seventh day when He "rested from all His work that He had done in creation" (Gen 2:3). God placed Adam in the garden of Eden to work and keep it (Gen 2:15), as man and woman were created in God's image and given dominion over all He created (Gen 1:26-30). It was here that Satan perpetrated his great lie, defaming God's character and the truth and authority of His Word (Gen 3:1-7). Satan implanted a seed of doubt in Eve's mind by questioning God's Word with, "Did God actually say ... ?" (Gen 3:1), attempting to change God's character by removing His single

prohibition: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat", from the context of His bountiful provision for them in that, "you may surely eat of every tree of the garden" (Gen 2:16-17). In His loving justice, God knew the judgement of their disobedience in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would result in death (Gen 2:17), because in the presence of His holiness, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). This death would include their eventual physical death as they would be cut off from the tree of life (Gen 3:22-23) and return to dust from which they were formed (Gen 3:19; Psa 104:29), and it would also include their spiritual death, "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25) and "the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things" (Rom 2:2) as they are without excuse (Rom 1:20, 2:1). So they were dead in their sin (Eph 2:1) and separated from God, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Eventually leading to the eternal state of torment in the second death to those who remain separated from God in their sin (Rev 21:8).

Satan's deception was based on using knowledge to appeal to man's pride, just as Lucifer's wisdom caused him to become proud and seek to exalt himself above his Creator (Eze 28:17; Isa 14:12-14). Satan lied about God in claiming that God knew that through knowing good and evil her eyes would be open and she would be like God (Gen 3:5). Satan suggested that she could have the knowledge of God: all knowledge, becoming omniscient as He is. The effects of Adam and Eve's acceptance of this lie of Satan are passed on to all men through Adam's nature (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22) and no one is righteous, understands or seeks for God (Rom 3:10-20).

Accepting Satan's deception and disobeying God resulted in man's opposition to the image that God had created him to enjoy in four primary ways:

- Theologically – man was spiritually in opposition with God;
- Psychologically – man's heart, mind, spirit and soul (his conscience, will and intellect) are antagonistically dysfunctional;
- Sociologically – men are in opposition with one another; and
- Biologically – man is in opposition with nature.

Believing Satan's lie resulted in man's dependence on self, believing that he could harness knowledge separate from, and even above God. "For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:21-22; Prv 28:26; Eph 4:17-18). Foolish enough to believe that they can decide whether or not God even exists (Psa 10:4, 14:1; Rom 3:18)! This eternally damned state of man in opposition with God, combined with man thinking that He is in any way independent or equal with God, results in complete inability to understand real truth (Rom 3:10-12; 1 Cor 2:14), with consciences that are seared (1 Tim 4:2), loving the darkness (Jhn 3:19), and hopelessly lost in their arrogance (2 Tim 3:1-5), as Satan blinds them from knowing truth (2 Cor 4:4; 2 Pet 3:5-6).

From here, man ignores the self-existent "I am" in whom "all things hold together" (Col 1:17), and builds a system of knowledge (epistemology) by reasoning and experimentation (as Eve reasoned and experimented with the forbidden fruit in defiance of the demonstrated power and truth of God's Word in creation). They attempt to place the eternal, unchanging God into their own boundaries of time asserting that chance and time define His work of creation (Rom 1:20). In attempting to rationalize their own existence, they can't accept a transcendent Creator-God, but subject all reality to the mind of man (Col 2:8; 1 Jhn 2:15-17, 5:19). Man is never epistemologically neutral. He either loves God or hates Him; he is for Him or against Him (Mat 6:24). As there is nothing transcendent on which to know, hope and trust, the only result is a hopeless nihilism, leaving them destitute in a moral void. All that remains for such men is judgement to eternal death and suffering for their rejection of the real truth (Mat 25:41; 1 Pet 4:5; Rom 2:16; Rev 20:10-15).

Truth of God

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jhn 14:6). Jesus is the Word, the power of God and the light of men (Jhn 1:1-5, Heb 1:3). Only in Jesus can we be freed from the effects of sin, our slavery to the lie of Satan (Jhn 8:31-36). Only through Jesus, the incarnate God, can our ability to know God be restored (Jhn 1:5, 14, 18). Only through the death of Jesus on the cross in payment for our sin of rejecting God and believing the lie of Satan can we come to a true knowledge of God (2 Cor 4:6). Only in Jesus are we reconciled back to God and made righteous in Christ as He was made our sin (2 Cor 5:19-21). Faith in Jesus is where God's glory and man's highest good are rejoined through the renewing of the mind (Eph 4:21-23). So it is as we believe in Jesus Christ, that God "has delivered

us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13; Acts 26:18). In His authority we are renewed back into knowledge after the image of our Creator (Col 3:10) and we can actually have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16; Jhn 16:13-15) as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

Only at this point are we capable of knowing the real truth. Only in knowing Christ will we understand truth, as God intends that "in everything [Jesus] might be preeminent" (Col 1:18). "For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross" (Col 1:19-20). In this exalted position, Jesus is able to conform us into our intended image of the Creator "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3). And through this, the Son of God (Jhn 5:18, 10:33-36) can accomplish His purpose of glorifying His Father in heaven though His work in us (Jhn 14:13, 17:1, 5:30).

In Christ, we are brought back into the understanding of our intended relationship with our heavenly Father as we are adopted as sons (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5). Being regenerated, as new creations in the image of our Creator, we are known by Him and we are assured that we know Him as we are enabled to walk in obedience with Him through the work of the Holy Spirit in us (Heb 8:11; 1 Jhn 2:3; Jhn 14:15). Man in the image of God, interpreting His revelation in Christ through the light of His Word and in the world, can discover God's absolute, unchanging knowledge as His sovereignty allows. From this position we can understand, and properly reverence our Father, and discover that "in the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prv 1:7). From this reconciled position with our Creator-Father-God, we can pursue true knowledge. "then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God" (Prv 2:5).

The Epistemological Task of Christians

The epistemology of a Christian is then completely antithetical to that of the world, under their father of lies who has actually blinded them from perceiving the truth (2 Cor 4:4; 2 Pet 5:5-6). In the image of our Creator-Father-God, through His indwelling Spirit, we can understand the special revelation given to us through His inspired, authoritative Word: the Bible (Jer 31:33; 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Cor 2:12, 14; 2 Cor 4:6; Jhn 14:26). The Christian's true knowledge is that based on God's knowledge which He gives us (Eph 1:17; Col 2:2-3; 1 Cor 2:7) as revealed through the preeminence of Christ (Col 1:18; Eph 4:13). And through us God spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ (2 Cor 2:14; 2 Tim 2:25). In

God's merciful common grace, He has chosen to make His eternal power and divine nature clearly perceptible to all men through His creation (Rom 1:19-20; Psa 19:1, 29:3; Isa 41:18-20).

As Christians, we must seek all knowledge that God has ordained for us to know. All knowledge will be through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. It is our God-given task in dominion over His creation to strive to understand all that God reveals in Christ, and to interpret it for the world to see the glory of God (Prv 25:2). We must not take lightly this task, for it is our duty to demonstrate God's glory to this age in hopes that He may quicken their hearts to Him. As Paul declared: "thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ" (2 Cor 2:14-17).

In God's sovereign plan, Satan's rule in this world continues to lead men astray from truth as they follow his lie and in their darkened state of arrogance, rebel against God's authority and His kingdom and righteousness in His saints, the church; therefore, we must be prepared to stand firm in the power of God's revealed truth. Paul encourages us to "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (Eph 6:13). "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). As with Timothy, we need to "avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim 6:20) of those who are "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:7). As John warned the beloved saints (1 Jhn 4:1-6), we must "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jhn 4:1), always confident in our God and His truth, as "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jhn 4:4). And we must "let [our] manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, ... standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by [our] opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God" (Php 1:27-28). If we do this, assured that "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (1 Tim 1:7), and if we are skilled in the word of righteousness, mature, having our "powers of

discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Heb 5:13-14), then we can "fear not, for [we] will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for [we] will not be disgraced" (Isa 1:4). And when we face the lies of the world in their denial of God "because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD" (Prv 1:29), we "must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting [our] opponents with gentleness. [Then] God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 2:24-25), knowing that if "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ... that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:1-4). We must pray that our testimony of love through the regenerating and sanctifying work of Christ in us as the Holy Spirit enables us to know God and to understand and act in a God-honoring way will cause the world to seek repentance leading to a knowledge of truth in Christ.

Be Alert: Pay Careful Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock

This last sections title comes from the final warning of Paul to the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:31,28). The warning aptly applies to all Christians seeking higher education as there will always be "fierce wolves ... from among your own selves ... men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). In the same way Paul warned the Colossians, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). Any worldview (philosophy of life or conception of the world) that is not from, through and to Jesus Christ as Lord is vain, empty deceit (Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 12:3). But, as Paul, we can trust in God's authoritative tool of protection, therefore "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

The other warning is against the sin of every man: the pride which so readily rises in all who gain knowledge without a complete understanding of their position in submission to Jesus Christ, their Creator, under God the Father. Paul warns the Corinthians of this prideful knowledge when he expressed, "we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God" (1 Cor 8:1-3). The restraint to becoming puffed up in

arrogance by knowledge is being built up in love. Being built up implies a process requiring work to put into practice what is learned through love of God and thereby love in all of our relationships. If we love God, we will properly understand our position in God's knowledge. Our submitting to Him as Lord will afford us our proper bearings in His kingdom. "And if I ... understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). Because we must "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19). It is love that is meant to be the fruit of our knowledge, and for this end we should agree with Paul in prayer, "that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Php 1:9-11). It is the working of love through us that will allow us to enjoy the rich knowledge of God: "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3).

Lastly, we should return to Paul's closing reminder to the elders of Ephesus, that hard work in looking to the needs of others rather than ourselves to demonstrate our love will bless God, ourselves and others. "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:33-35). While Paul's reminder was in defense of his conduct, he was upholding his example as something that can be patterned after the principle Jesus demonstrated in giving Himself for us. In applying that principle to our endeavors in higher education, it is important to realize that education should be a treasure used for the good of others. We must work diligently with our minds and hands in humility to serve others in our labor of learning and improving this world through applying what we learn so that we can give what will minister to others for the glory of God in Christ.

Let us diligently study to know all God will reveal to us in Christ. Let us speak clearly, with gentleness, and boldly declare His glories in Jesus Christ. And let us see the fruit of love which God's grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ will produce to God's glory.

"Growing in grace and knowledge" (2 Peter 3:18)

** All scripture was quoted from the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible (Crossway Bibles, 2001).

Email: info@acu-zambia.com

Website: www.acu-zambia.com