

## A Biblical View of Knowledge (Epistemology)<sup>1</sup> - by Scott Christensen

### *Ontology and Epistemology*

A Biblical view of knowledge (epistemology) must proceed from a proper Biblical view of being (ontology). God as described in the Old and New Testaments is to be understood distinctively as the Creator. All human beings are to be understood as creatures of the Creator (Col. 1:16). Therefore, there is a fundamental Creator/ creature distinction to be made. God is ontologically ultimate in that He cannot be predicated upon anything outside of Himself (i.e. He is not dependent on any created thing for His existence - He is self-existent). Certain attributes of God such as His infinite and eternal character are predicated of Him alone. In this regard, temporality and finitude are uniquely components of creation and has no univocal correlation to the eternal and infinite God of creation. Eternality and infinitude is not a set of distinct (i.e. created) realities of which God finds Himself existing within, rather they are ontological properties of God Himself. He *is* eternal and infinite. So then, along with all of God's other superlative and transcendent attributes, it must be said that all things outside of God are derivative of Him. For example, it must follow that all created things were created by divine *fiat ex nihilo* (spoken out of nothing). To say otherwise, undermines the very nature and existence of God. All matter is not coterminous with God; rather derives from the creative power of His self-existence.

From these considerations, it is to be postulated that the idea of *knowledge* is predicated of God in the ultimate sense. All knowledge is coterminous with His self-existent nature (i.e. it is self-contained within His being - Col. 2:2-3). God's knowledge is comprehensive and exhaustive. He alone is cognizant of the breadth and depth of His own knowledge which equates to all knowledge. "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13-14; cf. 1 Cor. 2:16; Rom. 11:34). This rhetorical question is intended to indicate that God is omniscient; He is the repository of all knowledge.

As creatures, all of man's knowledge is therefore derivative. In other words, it is not inherently his own. All knowledge regardless of its character is given by God. "Who has put wisdom in the innermost being, or has given understanding to the mind?" (Job 38:36; cf. Job 32:8 - "the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding"; cf. also Exod. 4:11; Job 35:11; Psalms 94:9-10; Prov. 20:12; Isa. 28:26, 29; John 1:5, 9). This may properly be said to be a component of the *Imago Dei* (man's creation in the image of God). God has indelibly impressed upon the ontological makeup of mankind the capacity for knowledge which is reflective of God Himself. In fact, man cannot truly understand himself until he acknowledges and understands God.<sup>2</sup> This distinguishes man from animals who have no capacity for reasoning and all manner of cognitive imagination (see Job 35:11; 2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 10). Such knowledge is limited by the finite character of man and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is indebted to the works of Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen, John Frame, John C. Whitcomb, John Calvin, Robert L. Reymond, Richard L. Pratt, Wayne Grudem, George J. Zemek, Kenneth S. Kantzer, Douglas Bookman, and Douglas Wilson.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin has said, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern. In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he lives and moves... Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself." *Institutes*, 1.1.1. We might add, man's knowledge of the world around him is properly ascertained as the next corollary to contemplating God correctly.

therefore can never plumb the depths of the knowledge of God who alone is the source of all knowledge (Again cf. Isa. 40:13-14; 55:9; Deut. 29:29; Col. 2:2-3).

### *Types of Knowledge*

There are two main areas of knowledge from a Christian worldview perspective. The first and most important is knowledge that comes from divine revelation (i.e. communicated directly). The other is non-revelatory knowledge. This is knowledge that is not communicated directly from God, but rather is the acquisition of other sorts of indirect knowledge God has placed within His creation that is ascertained by human reason and discovery. Non-revelatory knowledge is the most vast dimension of knowledge, but also comparably unimportant in light of revelatory knowledge. Though revelatory knowledge (in particular special revelation) has very limited content, it is vastly more important than non-revelatory knowledge.

#### *Divine Revelation*

Knowledge that comes from divine revelation is of two types: general revelation and special revelation. Both forms of revelation are of a non-discoverable nature. In other words, they cannot be discovered or ascertained by human reason. General revelation is that which is revealed by God to all men in all places at all times regardless of any apparent contingent factors (including individual capacities for reasoning). Such revelation is limited in its capacity, but it truthfully discloses the general reality of God through the external realm of creation (Rom. 1:18-20; cf. Psalms 19:1-6)<sup>3</sup> and the internal conscience of man (Rom. 2:14-15). This is an innate (i.e. intuitive) awareness of God all men have. Note the conscience is to be distinguished from man's capacity to reason. It requires but minimal intellect to acknowledge general revelation in the conscience. General revelation reveals both general attributes of God's character as well as his moral law giving every man a sense of what is morally right and wrong and that such moral knowledge comes from God as the source of what is just and right. This knowledge of God's morally binding law is inescapable for all human beings and makes them equally culpable for their actions before Him. It ultimately condemns them if they do not respond to God in faith and repentance (Rom. 1:18, 32; 2:1-5).

God's special revelation is that which gives testimony and meaning<sup>4</sup> to His acts and purposes in history and ultimately as embodied in the person and work of Christ (cf. John 5:39; Heb. 1:1-2:4). This special revelation is inscripturated into the Bible of the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, it is the most important source of knowledge for man since it contains the only way of understanding and apprehending man's need of redemption (2 Tim. 3:15); whereas, general revelation leads only to an indictment of man resulting in condemnation. In this regard, special revelation is redemptive whereas general revelation is not. Special revelation gives us the clearest knowledge of God, ourselves and the world we live in. Christ as the Word (John 1:1) is the

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<sup>3</sup> Note in one way or another every fact of creation points to God though limited in what it communicates about Him.

<sup>4</sup> It is not enough to say that special revelation is merely a record of divine action. It is also God's interpretation of that action that gives it meaning and significance. Therefore, special revelation involves not only divine events and actions, but also propositions of truth about those actions that supply them with meaning and significance. One witnessing the actual death of Christ could not possibly know that it was an atonement for human sin unless they understood that God supplied that meaning to the event. Another example would be the observer of Christ's resurrection. Many can acknowledge the resurrection as a brute fact, but assign it a meaning that God did not intend. Thus, the resurrection carries no redemptive significance for a person unless they understand what it means. One can affirm the resurrection occurred but not understand what it means. Paul's affirmation of the death and resurrection of Christ as essential to the gospel is only essential as it is interpreted "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Without the divinely supplied interpretation of the 'facts' of the crucifixion and resurrection they are meaningless events to the unformed and disbelieving observer.

ultimate revelation of God. To know Christ is to know God most truly (John 14:6-11). Whereas, general revelation is understood clearly by all men (Rom. 1:19-20) yet suppressed in their consciences (Rom. 1:18, 21-22, 28, 32); special revelation must be conveyed to man by human agency (e.g. Rom. 10:14-15). Furthermore, the natural man (i.e. unregenerate) is incapable of understanding special revelation apart from divine illumination (1 Cor. 2:6-16; cf. Matt. 16:17; 23:8-10; John 6:45). In other words, he must have his mind regenerated by the Holy Spirit thus making him a child of God (1 Cor. 2:15-16; Eph. 4:23).<sup>5</sup>

The fact that revelatory knowledge (i.e. general and special revelation) is ethical and spiritual in nature points to the fundamental issue of man's problem before God and the reason he stands in a state of culpability before Him. God's divine revelation to man points to his sin and rebellion against God and thus concerns the most important issue for mankind, his redemption. General revelation points to man's sinful culpability, whereas special revelation highlights this culpability and provides the remedy for it in the person and work of Christ (thus it alone is redemptive in nature). Therefore, divine revelation and in particular, special divine revelation, is the most important as well as necessary knowledge for man if he is to be rightly related to God.

### *Non-Revelatory Knowledge*

The other area of knowledge concerns matters of a non-revelatory nature. This is knowledge which is discoverable from the resources God has provided in His creation and by virtue of the fact that He made man a rational creature (reflecting His image) who is able to discover and appropriate all kinds of knowledge God has made available in the creation for man's use.<sup>6</sup> This knowledge has no redemptive value whatsoever, even though an appropriate understanding of it should lead one to acknowledge God as its source. In this sense, there is overlap in such knowledge with general revelation. However, the primary distinction between this kind of knowledge and that which is part of general revelation (and special revelation as well) is that it is not ethical or spiritual in character per se. It may touch upon ethical and spiritual matters, but in and of itself it has no such implications (see footnote #8 and last section of this paper for further elaboration on these points). A simple example of such knowledge would be the mathematical axiom,  $2+2=4$ .<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The unregenerate can have a cursory understanding of special revelation, but the knowledge does not become significant to him. In other words, it does not strike him as being important and therefore, he ultimately has a disposition of unbelief and regards what he does know at best as inconsequential and at worst foolish and worthless (see 1 Cor. 1:18-24). The "spiritual" understanding of the regenerate (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14) is such that the knowledge they have of God is not just accepted as true, but it is embraced as having utmost significance and transforming power (cf. Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:4-5).

<sup>6</sup> Note that God's knowledge being absolutely comprehensive and self-contained means that He does not learn anything. God has always known everything. He never has to remember anything because He never forgets. God never needs to investigate anything since everything is laid bare before Him (Heb. 4:13). All knowledge is ever present with Him. However, man's knowledge (particularly in the non-revelatory realm) must be learned (aspects of special revelation must also be learned by the aid of a regenerated mind in order to make sense of it - 2 Tim. 2:15). Due to the Creator/creature distinction man's general knowledge is derivative and therefore requires in him a process of discovery. Children are not born able to speak and comprehend their world; it requires growing, learning and investigating. Note again how this distinguishes man from the animal world. The animal world operates largely by instinct. Man was created to learn.

<sup>7</sup> In some senses all natural knowledge within the creation points to God and can fall under revelatory knowledge (i.e. specifically general revelation). We might add, that some knowledge points more clearly to God than perhaps others. We may speak of a continuum of knowledge that points more or less clearly to God. However, along that continuum, the less certain kinds of knowledge (factual data) points clearly to God, the less ethical and spiritual implications it has.

### *The Character of Man's Knowledge*

The extent to which man is capable of true knowledge (i.e. uncorrupted knowledge) is paralleled in his ability to reconstruct meaning receptively (i.e. think God's thoughts after Him - Psa. 36:9). In other words, God alone is able to give true meaning to any realm of knowledge. Man's proper interpretation of 'facts' are no more than reiterations of God's interpretation. Anything is true because God made it true. One can only claim to know a 'fact' if they know that fact as God knows it and has already given it its meaning. It is in this sense that it can be said that all truth is God's truth.<sup>8</sup> However, whatever is true must be discerned as true by appeal to what we know is the meaning only God gives to what is regarded as true. Without the confidence that God makes something true, man can have no certainty that something is true. Thus it becomes necessary to have both God's revelation and/ or God's enablement to understand what He has regarded as true. Man can only perceive something to be true because God gave him the capacity for understanding it (i.e. via human reason) and/or revealed it to him (i.e. via reason and conscience).<sup>9</sup> Without God's intended meaning, all knowledge becomes a matter of unregulated contingencies, mired in unsubstantiated speculation and error.

### *The Justification of Man's Knowledge Rests in the Authority of God*

This means that God is the ultimate court of appeal for justifying truth claims. The ultimate authority by which one justifies claims to truth must rest with God since no higher authority exists. Furthermore, since Christ is the ultimate revelation of God (John 1:1, 4, 5, 9; Heb. 1:1-3), God mediates His authority through Christ who is co-equal with the Father. "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form... and He is the head over all rule and authority" (Col. 2:9-10; cf.

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Nonetheless, there is no area of knowledge by which man can hide from God, since every fact and every issue points back to Him.

<sup>8</sup> This phrase is widely distorted among many who espouse a deficient Biblical epistemology. Many Christians equate general revelation with any knowledge in creation outside special revelation (i.e. Scripture). So they speak of two books of truth, that of special revelation and general revelation. Although in this scheme there is explicit theoretical acknowledgement of the supreme authority of special revelation as contained in Scripture, generally, these two realms of knowledge are given equal weight functionally in matters of truth (and in particular, spiritual truth). For example, many believe useful truth can be gleaned from secular fields of knowledge like psychology that supplements truth from the Bible for man's spiritual edification and betterment (see more on this issue in the last section of this paper). This stems from a misconception of general revelation which is limited in its breadth and depth. General revelation is confined to things in creation that specifically point to generalized characteristics of God's being and to the moral sense of man as revealed in his conscience reflecting the righteous law of God. Beyond these limited areas of truth, general revelation does not extend. Thus, one must not equate non-revelatory areas of knowledge with general revelation except where some overlap occurs related to these two dimensions of general revelation. For example, the truthful axiom  $2+2=4$  points to a God of order, logic and purpose, but says little more about Him. Although the content of non-revelatory knowledge may be true (e.g.  $2+2=4$ ), it has no redemptive value. In other words, it contains nothing of ethical and spiritual truth as only revealed in divine revelation. The degree of ethical and spiritual truth contained in general revelation is limited and also is of no redemptive value. Only special revelation as inscripturated in the Bible is both ethical and spiritual as well as redemptive. In other words, it alone contains what is necessary knowledge for man's spiritual salvation and what is required of him to bring glory to God in his thinking and living. Neither general revelation nor non-revelatory knowledge is capable of extending these truths to man.

<sup>9</sup> This holds true for all people with regard to general revelation and non-revelatory knowledge. However, the limitations of these particular areas of knowledge leaves man without a proper foundation for understanding God, himself and the world he lives in. Thus, special revelation is necessary in order to make sense of the latter. However, it is required that man's reason be divinely regenerated before he can gain access to the meaning to these crucial matters. The corrupted reason of unregenerate man always distorts the other two areas of knowledge which this paper further details.

also Matt. 28:18 - “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”). This naturally follows the fact that Christ as God is the repository for knowledge in the first place (Col. 2:2-3). Subsequently, Christ mediates His authority through the inscripturated special revelation - the Bible (John 17:17). To justify ultimate claims to truth by some other authority such as reason, logic, sense perception, experience, etc... is to undermine that which gives meaning and substance to these human faculties in the first place. God is the creator of reason, logic and sense perception and so they must be justified on the basis of His self-existent and transcendent authority, not the other way around. To justify God’s authority and knowledge that comes from God by these means is to undermine His authority and jettison true meaning to any realm of knowledge. Furthermore, it is not only imprudent to neglect this authority it is immoral (“Let God be found true, but every man a liar” - Rom. 3:4; cf. James 4:4). Thus, reason, logic and sense perception must be submitted to the authoritative revelation of God. This is why we read, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). Man exalts reason, human philosophy and tradition over the authority of Christ, the highest judge of the universe. In doing so, again he mires himself in unsubstantiated speculation and error.

#### *Man’s Knowledge is Finite*

The reason man’s knowledge is mired in speculation and error is twofold. First, man is finite by nature. His epistemological capacity is therefore finite. Since knowledge by definition must be infinite in character by virtue of its source in God Himself, the human capacity for knowing is thereby limited due to the Creator/ creature distinction. This also means that God is ultimately incomprehensible. God is capable of being truly known but not fully known. Therefore, seeking to expand beyond the limits of God’s self-disclosure (i.e. revelation) epistemologically is to venture into unbridled speculation.

#### *Man’s Knowledge is Corrupted by Sin*

Secondly, man suffers under the debilitating effects of noetic sin (i.e. how sin affects the mind). Sin has corrupted his mind and reasoning abilities so that he falls into ethical and spiritual error (cf. Isa. 1:5; John 1:5, 9-10; Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:14-18; Eph. 2:2; 4:17-18; Titus 1:15). This causes the unregenerate mind to suppress the true knowledge of God in general revelation (Rom. 1:18) as well as special revelation when confronted with it. The result is a devastating dichotomy for the sinful individual. On the one hand, he has an escapable true knowledge of God - on the other, he desperately seeks to deny that very God. Such knowledge of God is ethical and spiritual in all its implications and leaves man in a state of culpability that leads to condemnation unless his mind becomes regenerate. Greg Bahnsen says, “At base all men know God as His *creatures*, but as *sinner*s all men refuse to acknowledge their Creator and live by His revelation.”<sup>10</sup>

However, fallen man does retain the capacity for rational thinking as he still retains the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), but his thinking and his interpretation of knowledge is distorted and corrupted by sin. Although he may arrive at valid conclusions<sup>11</sup> in some areas of thought, he misinterprets those conclusions. By rejecting the source of knowledge, he pretends to be autonomous (i.e. a law unto himself; self-rule) rather than theonomous (i.e. submitted to the rule

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<sup>10</sup> *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996), 38.

<sup>11</sup> According to Luke 16:8 there are times the unregenerate think more clearly and cogently than do the regenerate.

of God) in his knowing. He seeks to act and think independently of the Creator to whom he is dependent on (Acts 17:25-28); while simultaneously seeking to reject that dependence (Rom. 1:18ff.). Rather than receptively reconstructing knowledge (i.e. thinking God's thoughts after Him via conscious dependence on Him), he unwittingly feigns a capacity for creative construction instead; thus, constructing elaborate self-made philosophies and ways of thinking which distort or deny the truth and promote falsehood (Isa. 5:20). In other words, fallen man is deceived into thinking that he is the source of true knowledge. He does not acknowledge that he is devoid of truly creatively constructive knowledge, for God alone thinks in this manner because He alone is the Creator of knowledge and all that is true. Instead, autonomous fallen man tries to believe that he is like God. He has become his own god, albeit a deceptively false one; and his knowledge is a counterfeit to true knowledge (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20).<sup>12</sup>

Because his starting point is corrupted, much of his knowledge is false. That which he is able to perceive as true is only so by virtue of his retention of the *Imago Dei*. Furthermore, that knowledge he retains which is true is of no redemptive value (i.e. it cannot reconcile him to God or provide him with knowledge to live for God's glory). For example, his knowledge of God in general revelation does not provide him with the necessary knowledge for his redemption. This can only come from his mind being divinely regenerated so that it can understand special revelation in Scripture (Thus, Holy Spirit wrought faith precedes true understanding in the spiritual and ethical realm). Nonetheless, fallen man's knowledge of God in general revelation should drive him to seek more of God in special revelation. However, all other non-revelatory knowledge may be useful to fallen man in temporal matters (e.g. matters of art, science, math, history, governance, economics, and even matters of social and ethical usefulness). God's common grace ruling over the realm of the regenerate and unregenerate alike, allows men to arrive at true and useful conclusions in the temporal world though in the unbeliever they are grossly misunderstood and grounded in a distorted worldview that rejects the creature's dependence on the Creator. Living apart from conscious dependence on the Creator in the end consigns every realm of knowledge to meaninglessness and leaves man in a state of confusion and hopelessness.

### *The Knowledge of Regenerate Man*

In contradistinction to the unbeliever, the Christian has the privilege of divinely enabled and renewed knowledge, having a mind that has been regenerated (Psa. 36:9; Zech. 4:6; Luke 24:45; John 3:31-34; Col. 2:2-4; 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 John 2:20, 27; 5:17, 20). "...But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Although the believer retains residual effects of noetic sin, he has a reformed perspective. Furthermore, he must develop his thinking by conformity to the mind of Christ. "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" (Rom. 12:2; cf. Eph. 4:23). So long as he lives under the Lordship of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 3:17) he is able to think

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<sup>12</sup> Descartes' famous dictum *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am") is representative of man's autonomous and anthropocentric epistemology. According to this line of thinking, human reason alone is all that is required to base one's acquisition of knowledge. It ignores the creature's dependence on the Creator. Descartes was one of the founders of modern Rationalism. In Rationalism, human reason is the judge of what is true. Some philosophers (Locke, Hume, Berkeley, et. al.) reacted to this epistemology with what became known as Empiricism. Empiricism believed that it was not human reason that was the final judge of truth, but the empirical sense perception of man (i.e. human experience). Immanuel Kant in his influential work *Critique of Pure Reason* sought to bring these two realms together. However, he espoused a kind of skepticism that appears to have jettisoned his epistemology altogether. To him God and the real world were ultimately unknowable. One thing can be said for Kant; without God to supply meaning to the world, man is indeed consigned to skepticism and ultimately nihilism. In all three of these cases, man is at the center of seeking to construct a foundation for knowledge while the Creator of knowledge is ignored.

with receptively reconstructive knowledge (i.e. thinking God's thoughts after Him in conscious dependence on Him) by meditating upon the special revelation of God as inscribed in the Word of God, the Bible (cf. John 8:31-32). The primary locus of Scripture is knowledge related to God and His redemptive purposes for man as exemplified in the person and work of Christ. In this regard, Scripture contains the supremely important and necessary knowledge for salvation as well as life lived for God's glory and God's purposes for His children. Such knowledge provides the one and necessary meaning by which man is able to understand God, himself and the world he lives in. The redemptive message of Scripture coupled with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ provides the foundation for all meaning giving regenerate man the only hope God affords.

### ***The Nature and Purpose of Non-revelatory Knowledge***

Thus, the Scriptures not only become the authoritative basis for true knowledge of God and His redemptive purposes, but also the basis for interpreting the general revelation of God and all other areas of non-revelatory knowledge of God's creation. In Christ are found *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). All non-inscribed factual evidence in creation (non-revelatory knowledge) is regulated by the rule of the written Word, for it is this objective authoritative revelation of God which becomes the grid through which to filter and make sense of all other knowledge. All the data of creation (i.e. facts) are only rightly interpreted by this Biblical grid. A Biblically grounded set of presuppositions is the only starting place for interpreting every fact and making sense of every fact within the framework of a Biblical worldview. God through Christ via the Holy Spirit is the supreme authority by which to subordinate all knowledge. Furthermore, the Bible is the divinely mediated authority for all knowledge. No higher independent authority exists other than God Himself by which to judge truth claims (John 14:6). And since God mediates His authority through His Word, no higher self-attesting authority exists to judge truth claims than the Bible (John 17:17). The Bible's redemptive message in Christ is the authority upon which the rest of the Christian worldview is built. So then, all non-revelatory knowledge must be subordinated to the authority of Scripture. Such knowledge only makes sense within the broader and more important realm of redemptive knowledge (i.e. the main themes of Scripture) that forms the fundamental foundation for who God is, who man is, and how the world fits into the revealed plan of God.

### ***God as the Source of Non-revelatory Knowledge***

This does not mean the Bible is the repository of all knowledge outside of direct divine revelation. Nonetheless, God is the source of all non-revelatory knowledge in so far as it is true (Prov. 3:19; 8:22-31). The Bible rather provides the matrix by which all non-revelatory knowledge makes sense and finds ultimate meaning and purpose. This is necessitated by two facts. First, all true knowledge in creation and regarding creation is true because God as the Creator made it so. He is the source of all true knowledge regarding His creation. Consider for example the words of God to Job, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). Then in Job 38-41 God proceeds to enlighten Job concerning His knowledge of remarkable aspects of His creation; detailing animal life within their environments including aspects of geology, oceanography, and meteorology. By extension, there is no area of knowledge of the creation that lies outside of God's purview.<sup>13</sup> That He allows man to discover and make profitable use of such knowledge is due to his common grace.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> To give one interesting example of such knowledge, Gen. 6:15 describes the size of the ark God commanded Noah to build which was 450 feet long, 75 in width and 45 feet high. It was not until modern times that sea vessels so large have been constructed. The size and proportion of the ark is very similar to many modern barges and cargo ships

### *God's Purpose for Non-revelatory Knowledge*

Secondly, all of creation and everything that it contains belongs to God (Psa. 24:1; 104:24; cf. Job 41:11) and is sustained by Him (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3); therefore He has a purpose for it. The purpose of the creation and God's creatures is to bring glory to Him. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). And again, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31; cf. also Psa. 19:1; 96:1-13; 97:1-12; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 5:13). God commanded man to be in dominion over and the steward of creation as God's vice-regents (see Gen. 1:26-28). He uniquely gave this responsibility to man among all God's creatures because man alone is endowed with the image of God (vss. 26, 27), giving him the capacity to act with such responsibility including making use of his ability to discover knowledge of the creation for this purpose. This means man was intended to rule and make use of creation for God's glory. The mandate is part of the fundamental purpose of God's creation of man. This mandate could not be fulfilled unless man grew in his knowledge and understanding of the creation.<sup>15</sup> The mandate is

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carrying similarly large loads. Modern marine technology has shown that the size and proportions of such a boat is ideally suited for stability in all sorts of sea conditions. This is of further interest considering the many ancient stories from various parts of the world that parallel the world-wide flood of Genesis. In some of these stories, the surviving boat described is shaped more like a cube or some other unusual shape and size rendering them completely unseaworthy, thus revealing these stories to be more mythological than plausible. However, the description of the ark in Genesis is not only plausible, but truly remarkable considering the paucity of ship building technology in those days. Though God gave Noah the instructions to build the ark, the instructions are brief. Certainly, with divine guidance, Noah was responsible to use his God-given logic, reason and skill to construct the mammoth vessel. God could have preserved Noah in some other miraculous way. Instead, He employed Noah's intelligence in a way that mirrored the supreme intellect of the Creator and thus brought Him glory as the next point in this section of the paper makes. See also Isa. 28:25-26.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that we do not always have an infallible way to test all such truth claims that are of a non-revelatory nature (certainly not in the way we can test claims to spiritual and ethical truth by the infallible revelation of Scripture). In this case we rely to a significant extent upon the God-given reason that all men are endowed with. Many non-revelatory truth claims seem self-evident from the standpoint of logic and reason (e.g.  $2+2=4$ ). However, other claims must be accepted only in a provisional manner as knowledge increases. New discoveries always supplement, revise or otherwise supplant non-revelatory truth claims previously accepted. For example, Einsteinian physics re-oriented thinking about Newtonian physics, generally in a revisionary or supplementary way. Even now, some of Einstein's observations that have been long accepted as fact are being questioned as new discoveries are made and scientific knowledge increases. This simply points to the finite character of non-revelatory knowledge. Although God knows exhaustively all matters related to his creation, the nature of man as His creatures means they do not have access to such exhaustive and true knowledge. Subsequently, this condition of noetic finitude ought to foster epistemic humility in man. He simply cannot know things as God knows things (Isa. 55:9). All non-revelatory knowledge is limited in scope. One may have absolute certitude regarding truth claims in matters of divine revelation if he is regenerate. One has this by virtue of a regenerated mind that depends upon God's claims for truth by faith. Thus, the Augustinian maxim, "faith precedes understanding" militates against the Thomistic maxim, "understanding precedes faith." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). However, all men, regenerate and unregenerate alike, are unable to have absolute certitude regarding non-revelatory truth claims. This does not necessitate against the claims themselves as possibly being absolutely true (e.g.  $2+2=4$ ). Rather it simply points to epistemological finitude in man. One difference does exist between regenerate and unregenerate thinking in this regard. The regenerate man is able to rest secure that absolute truth exists, because all truth ultimately rests upon an absolutely truthful God. The unregenerate man rejects this notion (at least theoretically, although not always functionally) because he rejects God as the source of truth. However, some unregenerate thinking may claim certitude, but this is based on the faulty notion that man himself is the measure and source of truth. Such thinking is sorely deceived.

<sup>15</sup> It is of special interest that Jesus Himself in his humanity "kept increasing in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52) as a boy. He made use of His mind to bring glory to the Father in all areas of knowledge, both spiritual and non-spiritual. Jesus' command of language and culture, including areas of mundane knowledge the people of Palestine would be

expressed in part via the responsibility that God gave Adam to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15) and to name the animals of creation (Gen. 2:19-20). This required Adam to grow in the knowledge of agriculture and to think analytically and perceptively in the realm of taxonomy in order to name and classify animals. The responsibility to have dominion over the creation grew as knowledge increased. So then, knowledge in every discipline as it has developed over time, be it in art, science, history, government, education, etc. is to be implemented for God's glory. Again, all such matters of knowledge with regard to the creation are regulated and understood within the context of God's supreme inscripturated revelation (i.e. the Bible).

As further clarification on these points, it should be noted that God's ownership and therefore purposes for creation not only speaks of Him as the Creator and Sustainer of it, but the active Sovereign Lord of creation as well. God's purposes for the world coincide with His sovereign Lordship over every aspect and dimension of creation and history. God is the Lord of everything and nothing stands outside the realm of His sovereign purposes. He purposes all things and accomplishes all things according to His purpose (Cf. Psa. 103:19; 115:3; Isa. 14:24, 27; 46:9-11; 48:3; Jer. 18:1-11; Dan. 2:20-22; 4:17, 32-35; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28; 17:24-28; Rom. 11:34-36; Eph. 1:11; 3:8-11). This reinforces the fact that all realms of knowledge ought to be subordinated to the Lordship of Christ. All true knowledge is justified by appeal to the authority of Christ.

#### *Man's Response to Non-revelatory Knowledge*

Unfortunately, when man fell he abrogated this responsibility and placed himself at the center of the creation for self-glory instead of placing God at the center for God's glory.<sup>16</sup> The mandate shall not be completely fulfilled until Christ returns to restore creation to its original purpose. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." (Col. 1:19-20; cf. also Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rev. 21:5). The creation itself longs for its redemption along with the sons of God in order that this mandate may be fully carried out under the reign of Messiah upon the earth (Rom. 8:18-22). This kingdom will extend into eternity in the new heavens and the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13) in which redeemed humanity will more fully carry out Christ's Lordship over the renewed creation (Matt. 25:14-30; Rev. 22:3-5). Only redeemed men under the presence of the great King will be adequately prepared to bring this kingdom mandate to full fruition. The kingdom of God on earth now is largely a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36). The spiritual kingdom will experience metamorphosis into a spiritual-material-political-cultural kingdom when Christ returns (Acts 1:6-7). Until that time, the primary mandate of the Church is to spread the gospel of the spiritual kingdom (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:18-20). As long as this present world suffers subjection to futility and corruption due to man's fall into sin (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:20-21) and harbors fallen men, the mandate will falter.

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familiar with (consider the many allusions to everyday life in the parables) was used to clarify and vivify the divine spiritual revelation He communicated.

<sup>16</sup> Note how quickly humanity slid into total self-ruination shortly after creation in which man's every thought was continually employed for evil (Gen. 6:5). God destroyed the earth by flood only to watch man slide again into autonomy and anthropocentrism at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4-9). Throughout history man has made use of divine resources in creation to exalt and glorify himself instead of the Creator. While fallen man is still able to discover useful knowledge of the creation, he uses this knowledge to exalt himself at God's expense. Furthermore, he distorts much of this knowledge and forms idolatrous and God-rejecting philosophies and ways of thinking that further corrupt his knowledge.

Nonetheless, this does not preclude the advancement of a Biblical worldview impacting the various disciplines in the present. To suggest that some realm of knowledge is not important and therefore ought not to be subordinated to the present glory and Lordship of the God of the universe is to suggest that some things stand outside the realm of His sovereignty and thus this undermines His sovereignty.<sup>17</sup> Christians find themselves engaged in the world at many different levels. To be ignorant of how to view one's place in the world is to abandon one's mind and be unwittingly subject to sub-biblical ideas that inadvertently bring dishonor to God. The regenerated man is to spurn unregenerate thinking and take every area of knowledge and submit it to the Lordship of Christ. "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). This means the Christian is to regulate *all* of his thoughts according to the revelation of God in Scripture so as to exalt Christ in his thinking and obedience in *every* discipline. Understanding Scripture will give him the ability to discern all that is deceptive in the worldviews of fallen man (Col. 2:8; 1 John 4:4-5). Without understanding and submitting one's self to Scripture, the regenerate man has no capacity to discern truth from error and he has no ability to make sense of everything else that passes through his mind. Scripture gives him the ability to properly interpret general revelation as well as all areas of non-revelatory thought.

Thus, beyond the primary redemptive message of Scripture, the Bible gives the believer a foundation for a proper view of art and aesthetics; music and literature; the various branches of theoretical and practical sciences; language; mathematics; medicine; technology; history; political governance; labor and economics; social responsibility; marriage and family; education and so forth. Each of these areas is subordinated to the redemptive message of Scripture located in the person and work of Christ, and therefore informed by that preeminent matrix. Thus, the Bible gives the regenerate person the proper God-focused and God-honoring worldview from which to make sense of the rest of the world and to bring glory to God in all his thinking and subsequent living.

### ***The Relationship between Areas of Knowledge***

It was previously stated that non-revelatory knowledge in creation does not necessarily have ethical or spiritual implications in and of itself. However, this does not mean that it does not have such implications at times, and in some cases pervasive and important implications. Important ethical and spiritual implications are manifest in both regenerate and unregenerate thought. For example, the laws of physics, though true (in as far as they can be fully ascertained), do not in and of themselves have ethical or spiritual implications. The laws of physics are useful in science and technology and result in much useful exploitation of resources given in creation (e.g. creating buildings, cars, machines, computers, etc...). However, when used to support an unregenerate

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<sup>17</sup> Clearly not all things are of equal importance in the plan and purpose of God. For example, evangelism as part of the present mandate of the Church clearly has priority over political involvement, but not to the total exclusion of it. One must not say that a Christian should never have a role in the governance of society since it is God that ordained government (Rom. 13:1-7). However, certain biblical priorities minimize the importance of other disciplines, institutions, etc... and the believer's commitments to them. But to say the Christian is entirely excluded from certain commitments and responsibilities would be the opposite error. Subsequently, all things fall within God's plan and purposes and therefore ought to be subordinated to His Lordship for His glory. Even the most mundane aspects of life ought to be lived for God's glory. Those who seek to pit the realm of non-revelatory knowledge against revelatory knowledge risk falling into a sort of Gnostic dualism. This heresy in the early church espoused the notion that the only knowledge that was profitable was spiritual knowledge. All knowledge that was confined to the material world was considered evil. We must not spurn non-revelatory knowledge; rather prioritize and regulate it in light of more important matters of revelatory knowledge in Scripture. For an excellent attempt at working out a comprehensive Christian worldview encompassing a wide range of disciplines from a thorough-going commitment to Scripture see *Think Biblically! Recovering a Christian Worldview*, John MacArthur, Jr., General Editor (Crossway Books, 2003).

worldview, they may have immense ethical and spiritual implications. Such laws may be sought to be employed in unbelieving cosmologies like the Big Bang theory. The philosophical underpinnings of such a cosmology presupposes a materialist/ naturalistic worldview that excludes God. The Big Bang theory in particular is predicated upon the origins of the universe that began in chaos and not the orderly design of the Creator. Of course it is questionable whether such laws of physics as are known to be true (again, in so far as they are ascertainable to a reasonable degree of certainty) can be rightfully employed in such endeavors.

To use a counter-example in the realm of science; if the Bible's record of a world-wide flood is accepted then it would of necessity have some implications for the present world and our understanding of geologic features in the world. The explanation of the signs of geologic forces in various locales by unbelieving science posits millions of years for the formation of many geologic features on earth. However, a Biblical worldview provides the basis for an entirely different interpretation of a wide range of data that the unbelieving scientist is compelled to reject because it points to the truth of the Bible (e.g. Noah's flood) which he rejects. True scientific inquiry will comport with Scripture whenever Scripture gives us a necessary framework for understanding some aspect of creation. Furthermore, true scientific inquiry supplements and supports a Biblical cosmology derived from a proper interpretation of Scripture. Such sanctified use of knowledge brings glory to God as it makes use of the proper function of knowledge as He gave it to man. The fact that such knowledge is possible demonstrates in and of itself that God purposes non-revelatory knowledge to bring glory to Him in addition to His revelatory acts of redemption as recorded and explained in Scripture. All knowledge should serve to bring glory to God.

Another example may help clarify the issues here. The study of human behavior can lead to very erroneous views of man as seen in secular psychology, whereas the same observations have a different explanation when understood in the light of Scripture. One worldview seeks to interpret data apart from seeing God's revelation as the source of truth, while the other does. Secular psychology is a whole discipline that has arisen in conscious rejection of God's revelation and therefore makes observations (some perhaps useful, many others un-useful and destructive to true knowledge) only to bolster unbelieving constructs regarding the nature and character of human behavior.

The more unregenerate thought seeks to tie non-revelatory knowledge to questions involving ethical, spiritual and redemptive implications the more distorted and corrupted it becomes in its presuppositions and conclusions. In other words, when non-revelatory knowledge in the hands of unregenerate thought seeks to inquire into matters that only divine revelation can answer, it will falter terribly upon the rocks of corruption. Furthermore, if regenerate minds are not applied to a full and comprehensive understanding of divine revelation in Scripture, such believers risk falling into error as well. This is especially true of those who seek to integrate Biblical knowledge of spiritual, ethical and redemptive truth with competing systems of thought among unregenerate worldviews and philosophies. Thus, there exist such syncretistic aberrations like "Christian Psychology" and "Theistic Evolution." The reality is the blending of such competing claims to truth ends up creating confusion at best and utter falsehood at worst. Therefore, the regenerate mind must always be seeking to be renewed and increasingly informed by the light of Scripture so as to discern between truth and error in ethical, spiritual and redemptive matters.