

# I'm the Smartest Man on Earth

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*1 Corinthians 8:1-3*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. The story is told that a youth minister, preacher, and Bible professor died and were waiting outside the pearly gates for admittance.
1. Peter came and told these three men that they were going to get into heaven: no worries. However, the Lord did want to talk to them about their various doctrinal beliefs.
  2. The youth minister went in to talk to Jesus. When the youth minister came out thirty minutes later, he said, "I'm glad I had all that stuff right."
  3. The preacher went in and was in there for 24 straight hours. When he finally emerged, he, shaking his head, said, "I didn't know I could be so wrong."
  4. The Bible professor went in to talk to Jesus and was in there for six months. At the conclusion of six months, Jesus walked out, shaking his head, and said, "I didn't know I was so wrong."
- B. If you've ever had a class at some of our brotherhood schools, you know there's a lot of truth in that joke.
1. Many of us have had a professor who seemed to know far more than Scripture ever taught.
    - a. Tammy tells me that her first year or so at a brotherhood college were quite traumatic.
      - 1) In her first day of one class, the professor told the class, "I know I'm in the light, and I'm saved. All of you are young and immature Christians. You're still in the darkness. If you were to die today, you might be saved and you might not be saved."
      - 2) She says that she called home quite often upset about what she was learning in her Bible class.
    - b. I once knew a professor in a brotherhood school who told me that he didn't know if evolution was true or false.
  2. There is a huge problem with that whole attitude.
    - a. I can never claim to know one bit of God's Will he hasn't revealed to me in Scripture.
    - b. In this morning's text, we read of some folks in Corinth who thought they knew it all when it came to eating food offered to idols.
      - 1) They claimed to have so much knowledge that those who did not have such knowledge were stupid and ignorant.
      - 2) Here in chapter 8, the situation is vastly different from the situation over in chapter 10:23-33.
        - a) In chapter 10, the question is about buying meat in the marketplace. Meat was very expensive in the ancient world, and people generally only ate meat two or three times a year. However, when they went and bought meat, it was 99.9% of the time meat offered first to an idol.
        - b) In this morning's text, the situation is eating meat in the pagan temple.
          - i. "If anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?" (v. 10).
          - ii. Pagan temples served as something like restaurants in the ancient world; they had dining halls where people would have birthday parties and the like. The priests would offer an animal to a god, cook the meat in the process, and bring it out for you to eat.
          - iii. Thus, the idea here comes much closer to worship than simply buying meat in the marketplace.

## THE DANGERS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE, vv. 1-2

- A. "Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge,'" v. 1a.
1. "Now concerning" likely serves as a break from the things Paul had previously discussed from the letter

he received from the Corinthians.

- a. In other words, this phrase informs us that this was an issue the Corinthians had raised with Paul.
- b. In fact, it seems likely that it was the strong—those claiming to have knowledge—who wrote the letter to Paul.

2. It seems the strong wrote the letter to Paul, for he writes, “We know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’”

- a. “All of us possess knowledge” is likely a quote from the letter the Corinthians sent to Paul.
  - 1) There are some translations which put those words in quotation marks to show that Paul is quoting someone.
  - 2) We are confident that Paul is quoting someone for the phrase “we know that” was used in Paul’s day to introduce well-known quotations.
- b. The question arises, however, exactly from whom did Paul get this quote?
  - 1) We do not know where exactly where Paul got the quote—from the letter the Corinthians sent him or from some philosopher or from some other source.
  - 2) It does appear, however, that the strong in Corinth were using this phrase, “We all possess knowledge” to justify their behavior.
- c. Here’s what seems to have been going on: The strong arrogantly boasted to have knowledge the rest of the church didn’t have.
  - 1) They proudly said in the church, “We know there is one God and that these idols aren’t really gods at all. So, because we can afford to go and eat meat more than you, we’ll go to the temple and eat. If we want to have our birthday parties there (it was very common to have birthday parties in pagan temples in Paul’s day), we’ll do that. If someone asks us to go to a celebration at the temple, we’ll go. You others folks are just plain stupid.”
  - 2) That knowledge—and the arrogance which went with it—were extremely dangerous to the health of that congregation.

B. That knowledge was dangerous, for “this ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up,” v. 1.

1. We all know the dangers of knowledge.
  - a. Is it not true that sin is in the world largely because Eve wanted knowledge? “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (Gn 3:6).
  - b. “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).
2. We need to understand that Paul isn’t condemning knowledge per se, but is condemning the arrogance which often accompanies it.
  - a. We know that knowledge is good in and of itself.
    - 1) How many of us encourage our children to do well in school so that they can learn and be productive members of society?
    - 2) How many of us spend much time studying the Bible so that we can understand the will of God?
  - b. But, we have all witnessed wisdom and knowledge run amok.
    - 1) Have you ever been to a doctor who thought that he was much smarter than you could ever hope to be? You asks a question and he jumps down your through because you’re just too stupid.
    - 2) Have you ever had a teacher who looked at you as though you were stupid if you asked a question?
    - 3) How about preachers or elders or Bible class teachers: Have you ever known one of them to act as though he had all knowledge and you were just stupid if you didn’t see things precisely as he did?
  - c. I fear that too often we have acted precisely that way in churches of Christ.
    - 1) If I tell someone, “That passage is complicated. I just don’t think you can understand it,” haven’t I become arrogant in my knowledge?
    - 2) If I tell someone, “That’s a bad Bible translation,” when I haven’t studied a word of Greek or Hebrew, am I not being arrogant?
  - d. Do not misunderstand me: We have an obligation to teach what others do not yet know.
    - 1) Notice what Paul says to the Colossians: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28)—Notice that Paul even says that he teaches “with all wisdom.”
    - 2) Yet, we absolutely must keep our attitude in check: “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).

- a) Paul isn't speaking of our dealings with non—Christians in that text, but he's specifically writing about speaking the truth in love in a congregation.
  - b) However, does the principle not greatly apply? As we speak the truth in love, not arrogance, will not many more people be attracted to Jesus and the church he built?
3. Instead of being puffed up with pride, Paul encourages the Corinthians to build up with love.
- a. For Paul, love is the greatest Christian attribute.
    - 1) "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountain, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2).
    - 2) "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13).
  - b. Would you rather people deal with you in arrogance or in love?
    - 1) Would you want your doctor to sit beside your bedside and say, "I have all the answers and I'm going to make you better" or would you prefer him to say, "Look, I don't have all the answers, but I care about you, and I'm going to do everything in my power to help you"?
    - 2) Imagine you're a non-Christian. Would you want someone to come to you and say, "You're going to hell, so you'd better repent" or to say, "I love you. Jesus loves you, and here's what he says you need to do"?
  - c. How will we deal with one another?
    - 1) Are we going to deal with one another like the Corinthians did and look down on those who don't understand what we do?
    - 2) Or, will we deal with one another in love?
- C. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know, v. 2.
- 1. If I think I have all the answers, I don't know as God would have me know.
  - 2. One of the best things which has occurred through my studies is that I've come to realize I know very little—I really don't think you can go to graduate school and come away thinking that you have all the answers about anything.
- D. Are we caught in the dangers of human knowledge or do we know the blessings of divine knowledge?

### **DIVINE KNOWLEDGE, v. 3**

- A. If anyone loves God, he is known by God.
- B. We understand that loving God is supremely important.
- 1. The ancient Israelites were instructed: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4). This is what Jesus referred to as the first and great commandment (e.g., Mt 22:37).
  - 2. The problem in loving God is that we equate love with emotion in this culture.
  - 3. How many people believe that loving God is an emotion?
    - a. They come into church and start waving their hands and dancing in the aisles because they're in love with Jesus.
    - b. They have a "REAL MEN LOVE JESUS" bumper sticker on their truck.
    - c. They send out a dozen e-mails a day about forwarding this message if you really love Jesus.
  - 4. In this culture, do we understand what loving God really is?
    - a. How does the New Testament define loving God?
      - 1) If we love God, we obey God—"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15).
      - 2) We also demonstrate love to God in service to our fellow man.
        - a) "God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do" (Heb 6:10).
        - b) "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brothers in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 Jn 3:16).
    - b. The Bible never ever defines our love for God—or for anyone else, for that matter—by what we feel in our heart but by what we DO. What do our actions demonstrate?
      - 1) Do we demonstrate love by striving to obey every word God has spoken?
      - 2) Do we demonstrate love by striving to serve our fellow man?
- C. If we love God, we are known by him.
- 1. Personally, I would far rather have God know me than for me to know anything.
  - 2. There are two words for "know" in the New Testament.
    - a. There is a word which simply means to know something, and there is another word—the word used in

this text—which has the nuance of “intimacy.”

- b. Let me illustrate the nuance in the two words:
  - 1) I can confidently, using the lesser word, say, “I know the Space Shuttle flies.”
  - 2) An engineer working for NASA could confidently use the word used in our text this morning and say, “I know the Space Shuttle flies.”
  - 3) The difference is that I know it flies, and the engineer, understanding the physics and the aerodynamics of the Shuttle, knows why and how it flies. It has an intimacy of facts that I could never hope to have.
3. Throughout the New Testament, the word for “know” here carries a nuance of intimacy.
  - a. This is the word used as a euphemism for sex: About Jesus’ birth to a virgin, we read that Joseph “knew her not until she had given birth to a son” (Mt 1:25).
  - b. This heightened word for “knowledge” is used throughout this text—“We know that ‘all of us possess knowledge’” in v. 1 means that we know this stuff forwards and backwards with great intimacy.
  - c. Thus, to be known by God doesn’t mean that God knows who we are, but that he has a relationship with us.
    - 1) “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10:14).
    - 2) We know that we, being in Christ, have an intimate relationship with God.
      - a) “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).
      - b) You simply can’t make your home with someone and not have a relationship with that person—whether it’s a spouse or a parent or a sibling or even a roommate.
      - c) Jesus says that if we love him, he and the Father will come and make their home with us. We will have a relationship with the Godhead. Do you have that relationship with God this morning? Has he come and made his home with you?